Adventure Guide to

Dominica & St. Lucia

Lynne M. Sullivan

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About The Author

Lynne Sullivan is a veteran travel writer with a passion for the Caribbean. As the author of multiple travel guides to dozens of islands, she spends much of her time there scouting out a variety of activities, sites, shops, accommodations and eateries. Her goal is to steer readers to the best each island has to offer, whether they are on a short cruise-ship stop, or an extended vacation. Back home in Dallas, Texas, her snorkeling gear and hiking shoes are always packed in anticipation of the next island adventure.

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Introduction

Dominica and St. Lucia tower tall and green over the turquoise waters of the **West Indies**, separated by 60 miles of Caribbean Sea and the French Island of Martinique. They share a common heritage and lay claim to some of the most magnificent acreage in the Lesser Antilles. Both hold tight reins on the galloping development that has run uncontrolled through neighboring islands and, as a result, still offer the pristine countryside and relaxed pace that have disappeared in other parts of the region.

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These two islands are ideal for nature lovers, scuba divers, hikers and bikers. Emerald-green mountains lure you onto trails that lead to hidden waterfalls and hot thermal springs; beaches with black or honey-colored sand beckon to you with the promise of sheltered offshore coral reefs; quiet fishing villages invite you to sample local culture, hospitality, and cuisine.

St. Lucia is the more developed of the two, and luxury-minded travelers will want to check into one of the world-class resorts that feature health spas, gourmet restaurants, and duty-free shops. **Dominica** caters to the just-give-me-a-comfy-bed-and-clean-shower crowd that prefers to spend extra cash on dive packages, hiking guides, and ample beer. There's really no need to restrict yourself. Both islands offer a variety of vacation experiences, and savvy travelers take advantage of the full menu.

Regional History

Pre-Columbian Inhabitants

Ongoing archeological studies conducted on various Caribbean Islands have traced the region's earliest inhabitants back 7,000 years to tribes of wandering fish foragers and plant gatherers of the pre-pottery or Archaic Period. Only sparse evidence of their existence remains, but researchers generally agree that subgroups of the extensive South American **Arawak** tribe followed migrating herds of animals from the eastern slopes of the Andes Mountains, north on the Amazon River

and its tributaries into the Orinoco Valley (in modern-day Venezuela and Colombia). From there, they made their way to the northern coast and continued across the Caribbean Sea (at the time the sea level was about 65 feet, or 20 meters, lower than it is today) to the Antilles Islands.

■ The First Settlements

The tribe split into several groups as it moved up the island chain, and their culture diversified, but their language remained fundamentally the same. People calling themselves Arawaks were discovered on the island of Trinidad by British sailors in the late 16th century, and earlier European explorers found tribes of Arawakan-speaking Lucayo, Igneri, and Taino Indians when they landed on islands in the north- and mid-Caribbean.

Arawak Indians still live in Guyana, Suriname, Venezuela, and French Guiana. However, they have become extinct in the Caribbean as a pure, distinctive race. Most of what we know about these early inhabitants comes from research done by a Spanish friar named Ramón Pané, one of the first Europeans to settle on the island of Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic/Haiti). While his study focused on **Taino Indians**, it is likely other Arawakan tribes had similar highly-developed rituals and sophisticated class distinctions.

Pané wrote that the Taino worshiped images called *zemis,* which they carved out of wood, stone, and other natural materials. These icons, in the form of human and animal figures, are still being uncovered on various Caribbean Islands along with evidence of the ball courts and dance grounds on which the Indians conducted their ceremonies.

From these and other findings, archeologists theorize that the Arawaks had a relatively elaborate system of rank and government, and the people were divided into four classes: slaves (*naborias*), commoners, nobles (*nitaynos*), and chiefs (*caciques*). The chiefs lived in special houses, were entitled to exclusive food and clothing, and received deferential treatment from the other classes.

Minor chiefs ruled only their own village, but the more important chiefs had control over entire districts or provinces. Each chieftainship was inherited through the female line, along with a set of titles and *zemis*. The ancestral idols were presumed to have supernatural powers that granted the new chief magical skills and extraordinary wisdom.

Arawak men wore a breechcloth (*nagua*) made of cotton or palm fibers, and the women dressed in aprons made of the same materials but in various lengths to denote their standing in the tribe. Both men and women cut their hair short and, on ceremonial occasions, painted themselves with figures of their personal *zemis*.

Columbus reported the use of gold ornaments, particularly a pendant (*guanin*) worn by the chiefs as a sign of rank. However, archeological digs have not recovered significant gold objects, and many scholars believe that Columbus exaggerated their use in order to impress the king and queen of Spain.

Other elements of Arawak life are more verifiable. The economy was based on fishing, hunting, and farming, which allowed each village to support a rather large population and an elaborate political and social structure. Village chiefs lived in a rectangular hut or *bohios*, while other members of the tribe lived in round huts called *caneyes*. Both dwellings were simple structures made of wooden frames topped by straw roofs that were sturdy enough to withstand hurricane-force winds. Villagers believed their *zemis* protected deserving humans from illness and storms, and each village and its chief was ranked in importance among the tribes by the number of *zemis* in their possession.

Other Arawakan tribes known as ***Caribs*** moved into the Antilles region sometime after 800 AD. They were a fierce, belligerent people who traveled through the Caribbean in small groups, sometimes made up of only family members. They lived in little wooden huts arranged around a central fire pit, which was probably the site of tribal meetings.

Village leaders, who were often the family patriarchs, supervised fishing expeditions among the men and farming projects among the women. In addition, they frequently led raids into neighboring settlements to steal valuables and kidnap young women, who became slaves and wives for Carib men. These feared warriors became legend in the Caribbean, and reports spread of cannibalism and ritualistic torture.

By the time Europeans arrived in the region late in the 15th century, the Arawak and Carib cultures had mingled, and the Indians were spending more time on agriculture than fighting. Nevertheless, early explorers were intimidated by the appearance of the natives, who painted bright-colored designs on their bodies and wore shell or stone jewelry in holes pierced through their ears and noses.

Perhaps it was the Indians' appearance that caused the Europeans to overreact and slaughter or capture the natives on sight. The Arawaks quickly were wiped out, but many of the pugnacious Caribs managed to escape and survive. Today, a few descendants still live in an area of Dominica known as Carib Territory.

The Europeans Arrive

Christopher Columbus is generally credited with the European discovery of the Caribbean Islands during four voyages between 1492 and 1502. However, Europeans shunned colonization for

more than a century because they feared the native inhabitants and were disappointed by the absence of gold. **Pirates** took advantage of the disinterest of official governments and used the islands as hideouts.

France and **England** began to recognize the potential value of the West Indies' fertile soil and year-round growing season in the early 1600s. The two countries sent settlers to Dominica and St. Lucia, drove most of the Indians off the islands or onto small reservations, and brought in slaves from Africa to farm the land. For many years, France and England fought over possession of the islands, and today evidence of both cultures is mixed with African influences and native traditions.

You'll find specific historical details for Dominica and St. Lucia near the beginning of each island's chapter.

Land & Sea

Location

Dominica lies between the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea, about 1,500 miles (2,414 km or 1,303 nautical miles) southeast of Miami and 1,763 miles (2,838 km or 1,532 nautical miles) east of Honduras, Central America. The French-aligned islands of Guadeloupe (to the north) and Martinique (to the south) separate the independent nation from other members of the **Windward Islands** of the **Lesser Antilles**.

St. Lucia is approximately 21 miles (34 km) south of Martinique and 26 miles (42 km) northeast of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Sailors can find Dominica and St. Lucia between 13° and 15° north latitude and 60° and 61° west longitude.

*Two distinct island chains run through the eastern Caribbean Sea. The **Greater Antilles** extend west-to-east just south of the Bahamas from Cuba to the Virgin Islands. The **Lesser Antilles** run north-to-south from the Virgins to Grenada, which sits just north of the Netherlands Antilles (Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao) and Trinidad, off the coast of South America.*

The Caribbean
Florida
Bahama Islands
Cuba
Jamaica
Haiti
Dominican Republic
Puerto Rico
Virgin Islands
Anguilla
Barbuda
Antigua
Guadeloupe
DOMINICA
St. Kitts & Nevis
Martinique
ST. LUCIA
St. Vincent
Barbados
Grenada
Trinidad & Tobago
Atlantic Ocean
Caribbean Sea
HONDURAS
NICARAGUA
COSTA RICA
PANAMA
COLOMBIA
VENEZUELA
GUYANA
Aruba
Curaçao
Tortuga
Margarita
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Geography & Topography

Dominica and St. Lucia are volcanic, with steep mountains, deep river gorges, lush forests, tumbling waterfalls, and astonishingly beautiful coastlines. Both islands treasure their natural resources and recognize the value of promoting responsible tourism and conscientious development. Thus, tropical vegetation still covers much of each island, and spectacular underwater reefs are protected by environmental laws.

More than two-thirds of Dominica's land surface is primary rainforest, making it perhaps the most untouched island in the Caribbean. St. Lucia is also predominantly rural, and much of its interior rainforest has been preserved, even though early colonists carved plantations out of huge chunks of the original forest. Modern developers have built exclusive resorts on prime land, and many more would like the opportunity to claim a prize piece of paradise. Nevertheless, conservation groups on both islands are doing a fine job of curtailing the rampant development that has plagued some of their Caribbean neighbors.

The highest peak in the Eastern Caribbean is Dominica's 4,747-foot (1,424 meter) ***Morne Diablotin****. St. Lucia's highest point is 3,118-foot (950-meter)* ***Mount Gimie****, but its most famous landmark is a pair of pyramid-shaped mountains called the* ***Pitons****. From a distance, they appear to sit side by side, but actually are on opposite sides of a bay.* ***Gros Piton*** *is 2,619 feet (798 meters) high;* ***Petit Piton*** *stretches to 2,461 feet (750 meters).*

Climate

As is typical of the Caribbean, Dominica and St. Lucia enjoy a year-round **average temperature** of 77°F. Daytime highs occasionally reach 90°F, and nighttime lows sporadically dip to 55°F, but thermometer readings usually range from 65°F to 85°F in non-mountainous areas. The surrounding waters, on both the Atlantic and Caribbean sides, maintain an average temperature of 80°F throughout the year.

Rainfall varies more dramatically. The driest months fall between mid-November and the end of March, and the rainy season runs from late May through October. Traditionally, the dry winter months are considered high season for tourism, but you should expect brief warm rainfall at any

time in the tropics, especially at higher elevations. During the summer **off season**, you can depend on frequent showers followed by long stretches of sunshine, with the resulting humidity tempered by northeasterly trade winds.

Hurricanes are always a possibility in the Atlantic and Caribbean during the summer and early fall, but the odds of any one island suffering a serious hit in any given year are quite low. The advice from here is be informed, be prepared, and go anyway.

Several agencies maintain web sites that make it easy to track tropical storms as they develop, including the National Weather Service's **Tropical Prediction Center** on the campus of Florida State University in Miami, www.nhc.noaa.gov, and **The Caribbean Hurricane Network,** which posts reports from correspondents living on the islands, www.stormcarib.com.

Companies that provide **travel insurance** sometimes offer policies that cover trip cancellation due to weather. A good travel agent or online insurance-quote service can lead you to a policy that meets your needs. Even if you decide not to buy weather-specific insurance, your airline company, tour operator, and hotel may offer compensation if your vacation is canceled or delayed by a hurricane. Compare the costs and coverage of various policies online at www.insuremytrip.com.

You can find the latest Caribbean weather information and forecasts online at www.caribbean-weather.net (click on "Island Forcasts").

Flora & Fauna

Plants

A wide assortment of tropical plants and trees flourishes on both islands because of sparse development, protected lands, dependable rainfall, and fertile soil. Scrub vegetation along the coasts gives way to dense forests on interior mountainsides, and the volcanic soil sprouts hundreds of species of flowering plants and ferns.

Seagrape trees grow wild along sandy beaches. Some get as tall as 30 feet, and the female bears clusters of fruit that turn purple when they ripen. These "grapes" are edible, but most people prefer them sweetened in jams or desserts. **Coconut palms** also are common on the beaches, and they can grow in sandy areas where few other plant survive. Islanders drink the liquid from the shell before eating the soft meat inside.

*The national plant of St. Lucia is the very fragrant pink **cabbage rose**. The national tree is the **calabash**. On Dominica, the national flower is the* **bwa kawib** *or **carib wood**. It grows wild in dry coastal areas, and bright red flowers bloom along its branches.*

Orchids, **African tulip trees**, **ferns**, **hibiscus** and **bird-of-paradise** are cultivated in gardens and grow wild throughout the islands. Even drier land supports colorful bushes such as **oleanders**, and a variety of **fruit trees** grow along the roadways. Much of the local diet is based on the abundant supply of mangos, bananas, papayas, soursops, passion-fruit, guavas and coconuts.

Huge **gommier** and **chatagnier** trees are the tallest and most impressive in the rainforests. They tower over a tangle of vines, ferns, mosses, and more than 300 other types of trees. Drier areas support **cactus** and **cedars**. Throughout both islands, gorgeous **flamboyant** trees (also called **poinciana**) put out a blast of red flowers every summer, and **African tulip trees** turn orange with blossoms each spring.

*The **manchineel** tree is dangerous. They typically grow along the coast, and most are identified by signs or a line of red paint on the trunk. The milky sap and small green or yellow fruit of this tree are poisonous and cause intense stinging if they come in contact with the skin. Illness or death can result from eating the fruit.*

Birds

You don't have to be a bird watcher to get caught up by the vast number and variety of species that live on or migrate through the northern Windwards. They land on your table when you eat outdoors, tease you while you try to nap on the beach, and steal small items off your patio when you're not looking. The following will help you identify a few of the most common winged creatures.

■ The **brown pelican** is grayish-brown with a long neck, long beak, and short legs, and is usually seen feeding along the shore.

■ The **magnificent frigate bird** (magnificent is part of its name) has a magnificent wingspan that can reach more than six feet. All of them are jet-black, and the males have red throats, while the females have white throats. They are pirates, and hunt everywhere on the islands.

■ The small **green-backed heron** has a distinctive call and gray-green feathers. The **great heron** has long legs and a long black feather growing from its white head.

■ The **snowy egret** is white with black legs, while the **cattle egret** (usually seen sitting on a cow) has white plumage and a tuft of orange feathers on its head.

■ The **kingfisher** is blue with a white breast and a ruffled tuft on its head. It floats in the air looking for food, and dives into the surf to catch fish.

■ The **bananaquit** is a little bird with dark feathers on its back and a bright yellow throat and breast. It loves sugar and will make itself at home on your outdoor table.

■ Native **parrots** nest high in the rainforests on Dominica and St. Lucia. The **Sisserou** is Dominica's national bird, and the **Jacquot** holds national honors on St. Lucia. All species are rare and endangered, and you probably won't see one unless you hike with a guide.

■ **Broad-winged hawks** are frequently seen soaring in wooded areas.

■ Various species of **hummingbird**, especially the **purple-throated Carib**, **green-throated Carib**, and the **antillean crested** are often seen feeding among flowers. The **blue-headed hummingbird** is a rare type found only on Dominica.

■ The **St. Lucia oriole**, called a ***carouge*** by residents, is a black and orange or yellow bird found only on St. Lucia.

Mammals, Reptiles & Amphibians

Wildlife on both islands is rather limited. The good news is, there's not much around to bite, sting, or attack you. The bad news is, there's not much around. Other than rats and mice – which you probably don't care to see – wild mammals are limited to **opossums**, **mongooses** (a ferret-like animal) and an occasional **agouti** (a rodent that looks somewhat like a rabbit).

Reptiles are more common, and you will have no trouble finding frogs and toads. The most interesting is the **tree frog**, which is tiny but puts on a loud symphony at night. On Dominica, you might run into a giant squatty frog known as a **crapaud** who likes to hang out in forests.

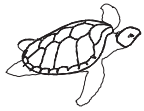
Common geckos – small, plain lizards – scurry everywhere along walkways, through window sills, and up walls (and usually run under some-

thing when you turn a light on at night). Be nice to them – they eat lots of mosquitoes. Native Carib Indians thought they carried evil spirits and spread rumors that they could only be removed from a person's skin with a scalding iron.

Pygmy geckos are only two inches long, and are found only on St. Lucia. Their color can change to various shades of brown to match their surroundings. **House geckos** hide in dark crevices until nightfall, when they scurry throughout dwellings. They grow to be five inches long, mostly tail. **Tree geckos** grow to be about six inches long. They have an elongated body, stubby tail, and can change color to blend with the foliage.

Iguanas look scary with their spiny backs, but they are strict vegetarians and don't care to share space with humans. These large lizards are rare and becoming rarer, so you'll only see them in a few remote areas. The **green iguana** grows up to six feet long, with almost half of the length invested in a whip-like tail. They are on the endangered species list of St. Lucia.

Sea turtles breathe air but live in warm oceans except when the females come onto land to lay eggs. All species of these large turtles are endangered, and require 15 to 50 years to reach a reproductive age, so their nesting grounds on sandy beaches are protected by wildlife societies.



*Despite the ban on hunting **sea turtles**, you may see products made from their shiny shells in markets. Don't buy them!*

The **leatherback turtle** is the largest in the world – it can grow to eight feet and 2,000 pounds. Long flippers extend from its black leathery shell. **Green turtles** have round, smooth shells and a blunt beak with serrated edges. It grows to be about four feet and 500 pounds. **Hawksbill turtles** have a pointed beak and a brown, gold, and yellow shell. Adults often measure three feet and weigh up to 175 pounds. **Loggerhead turtles** have a large head and tapered shell. They grow to an average of four feet and their weight tops out at about 400 pounds.

You can get information about, and view pictures of, the most common Caribbean fish on the REEF web site (Reef Environmental Education Foundation), www.reef.org; check in "Fish Gallery" under Web Resources, then in Caribbean/Florida/Bahamas.

The islands do have **snakes**, but not as many as you would expect, and most are harmless. Even the **boa constrictors** are non-venomous, and

shy away from people. However, the **fer-de-lance** snake that lives on St. Lucia is poisonous and extremely dangerous. You're not likely to run into this snake unless you're in tall brush along river beds, but take extra precautions when you hike, especially if you go off heavily used trails.

Island Culture

Most of the residents of Dominica and St. Lucia trace their ancestry back to African slaves who were brought to the islands to work on plantations. Today, as free citizens of independent island nations, the majority live in small coastal villages.

While the population of St. Lucia is growing, recent counts show the population of Dominica is decreasing slightly. The total number of people living on Dominica is now less than 70,000, with about 16,000 living in the capital city of **Roseau**. By contrast, approximately 170,000 people live on St. Lucia, and more than 67,000 live in **Castries**, the capital. These figures are more meaningful when you consider that St. Lucia, with 238 square miles, is a bit smaller than Dominica, which covers 290 square miles.

Language

Officially, **English** is the language of both islands. However, locals prefer a hybrid patois known to scholars as **Lesser Antillean Créole French.** It's a musical dialect, and you may be able to pick out a few recognizable French, English, and Spanish words. In addition, residents of remote villages on Dominica speak ***cocoy***, a clipped pidgin English mixed with ancient Carib and Arawak Indian words. Don't expect to understand conversations between islanders, but you won't have any trouble communicating, since most people quickly switch to lilting English when they speak with tourists.

English is taught in schools, and the literacy rate on both islands is steadily growing. **Créole** (also spelled **Kwèyòl**) is the most used language not only on the streets, but also on local radio and television programs. Don't mistake this hybrid with street slang. According to erudite publications, such as the 14th edition of *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, edited by Barbara F. Grimes, Kwèyòl has an established orthography (spelling) and grammar, and is used in literary works, newspapers, and by well-educated professionals during business transactions.

Residents who work for international or tourist-oriented businesses read, write, and speak English fluently. If you're a language buff, or just enjoy knowing a few common phrases when you visit a foreign location, sign onto the Dominican Internet site, www.cakafete.com/kweyol.htm. Here

you'll pick up basic Créole words, such as French-like *bon jou* (good day), *mèsi* (thank you), and *souplé* (please).

Cuisine

West Indies and Créole dishes make good use of locally available seafood, fresh produce, and island spices. West Indian cooking is influenced more by Africa, while Créole cuisine takes its cue from France. Many food items must be imported, so restaurant meals tend to be pricey. If you're on a budget, pick up breakfast at a bakery and make a picnic lunch from supermarket purchases. Some hotels offer "meals included" plans, but signing on limits your chance for excellent meals at local cafés. Plan to enjoy at least some of your dinners at colorful island establishments.

*Most restaurants in the main towns and tourist areas accept major **credit cards**, but it's a good idea to have cash available for snacks or meals at rural cafés.*

Both islands have a few fast-food joints that serve fried chicken, pizza, hamburgers, and sandwiches, but give the local cuisine a chance. Odds are, you'll prefer it.

■ Common Menu Items

■ **Accras** or **amarinades:** spicy doughnuts/fritters usually made from cod or other fish, but sometimes from vegetables.

■ **Balaou:** small fried fish.

■ **Bakes:** a fried dough patty filled with fish or meat.

■ **Blaff:** spicy lime-and-garlic bouillon used to cook fish. The word is said to come from the sound the fish makes as it hits the boiling liquid.

■ **Breadfruit:** large melon-like fruit.

■ **Cabri:** small, bony goat, usually prepared as colombo or smoked.

■ **Calalou/callaloo:** soup made with herbs, vegetables, crab, and pork.

■ **Carambola:** starfruit.

■ **Christophene:** vegetable similar to a potato, particularly delicious when prepared au gratin.

■ **Colombo:** curry. In the Caribbean, it is usually a mild green curry that is not as hot as Indian curry. The most common colombo will be cabri, small goat, but occasionally it is chicken or pork.

■ **Conch/lambi:** large shellfish whose chewy meat is served in spicy sauces.

■ **Court-bouillon:** tomato, pepper, and onion mix.

■ **Crabbe de terre/crab farcis:** land crab cooked with coconut and hot pepper.

■ **Cutter:** a hero or submarine sandwich made with meat or fish.

■ **Dasheen:** root vegetable whose roots are used in callaloo. The potato-like root is used in a dish called *provisions.*

■ **Farci:** stuffed land crab.

■ **Féroce:** avocado, hot pepper, and cod salad.

■ **Fricassée:** fish or meat browned and stewed in a skillet.

■ **Giraumon:** pumpkin.

■ **Goat water:** spicy stew made of goat meat and often flavored with rum.

■ **Igname:** any of a wide variety of yams.

■ **Johnnycake:** pancake-like treat made of cornmeal and cooked on a griddle.

■ **Langouste:** Caribbean lobster, no claws.

■ **Manioc:** cassava/tapioca flour.

■ **Maracudja:** passion fruit.

■ **Mauby:** a tree whose fruit is used to make a popular tart drink that is sweetened with sugar and flavored with spices.

■ **Migan:** mashed bananas and breadfruit.

■ **Mountain chicken:** frog legs that come from the large crapaud.

■ **Ouassous:** big freshwater crayfish.

■ **Oursin:** sea urchin.

■ **Pepperpot:** stew made of meat and hot peppers.

■ **Pigeon peas:** seeds from a scrub that are cooked like peas and served with rice.

■ **Provisions:** root vegetables such as dasheen, yams, sweet potatoes, tannia, and white potatoes. Very popular side dish.

■ **Roti:** curried meat and/or vegetables wrapped in flat bread like a burrito.

■ **Schrub:** a liqueur made by soaking oranges in rum.

■ **Sea-moss drink:** rumored to be an aphrodisiac, it tastes somewhat like a vanilla milkshake.

■ **Souse:** commonly called *souse 'n puddin'*, the souse is pickled pig's head cooked with spices, while the puddin' is sausage made of pig's blood.

■ **Souskai:** green fruits, grated and macerated in lime juice, salt and hot pepper.

■ **Ti-punch:** drink made of rum, cane syrup, and lime.

If you order mountain chicken in a restaurant, you'll be eating crapaud legs, which are considered a delicacy. Forget you know what it is and order it Créole style.

Travel Information

Best Adventures

■ Hiking to the peak of Dominica's Morne Diablotin or St. Lucia's Gros Piton.

■ Sighting one of the islands' endangered parrot species.

■ Snorkeling or diving around pristine coral reefs, home to countless rainbow-colored fish.

■ Trekking through rainforests and discovering waterfalls tumbling into swimmable ponds.

■ Exploring nature preserves that protect endangered and indigenous plants and wildlife.

■ Biking the winding roads that follow the coastline and cut through fertile valleys.

■ Encountering whales, porpoises, and dolphins off the coast.

■ Kayaking the rivers, bays, and marshes.

■ Scouting historical forts.

- Dancing with the locals at a Friday night *jump-up*.
- Sampling native food, rum, and beer.
- Fishing the deep seas for marlin, kingfish, wahoo, and shark.

When to Go

The Caribbean enjoys perpetual summer, but the islands do have seasons – **high** and **low** – and the time that you decide to visit may depend more on the state of your finances than the weather. Vacation costs vary significantly between winter and summer, and budget-conscious travelers often choose to visit during the off-season when more bargains are available.

Airfares and hotel rates are at their peak from December through mid-April, with Christmas, winter break, spring break, and Easter weeks topping out at more than double summer prices. If you want to escape miserable weather in your hometown, consider scheduling your Caribbean holiday after New Year's Day and before the start of school children's winter break. The crowds will be sparser and the prices a bit lower.

After Easter week, prices begin to decrease until they bottom out during hurricane season in late summer and early fall. You'll be able to find airline tickets, cruises, car rentals, and resort packages at bargain rates, but be aware that some businesses close during this down-time. If you can live with the downside, or consider the possibility of a hurricane an exciting lure, by all means take advantage of the low-season bargains.

■ Planning Your Trip

A good **travel agent** can save you hours of work, endless frustration, and, with any luck at all, a sizeable sum of money. Contact a couple of certified agents who specialize in the Caribbean (see below), then check their quotes with a bit of Internet research. You may find cheaper rates online, but a good agent should be able to put together a total package that meets or beats web prices.

Once you decide on the details, pay for your vacation by **credit card**. This allows you the right to dispute charges for services that were misrepresented or never delivered. Trip insurance offers further protection, and you can compare the costs and coverage of various policies online at www.insuremytrip.com.

Check Those Credentials

The **Travel Institute** (formerly ICTA) is an international, non-profit organization that accredits travel agents. To earn status as a **Certified Travel Agent** (CTA), professionals must work in the industry for at least a year and a half, and complete specified training. The **Certified Travel Counselor** (CTC) status is granted to those with at least five years of experience in the industry. The Travel Institute web site, www.icta.com, allows you to search for a certified travel agent with an office near your home. Click on "Find a Travel Professional" at the top of the home page to get started. You may also call the Travel Institute for a referral, ☎ 800-542-4282.

If you're planning a cruise, find a certified agent through the **Cruise Lines International Association** (CLIA; www.cruising.org). Enter your zip code in the space near the bottom of the web site's home page to be guided to a CLIA associate near you.

In addition to verifying certification, ask if your potential travel agent is a member of any professional associations. Two of the best-known in the US are the **American Society of Travel Agents** (ASTA, www.astanet.com,) and the **Association of Retail Travel Agents** (ARTA, www.artaonline.com).

Once you've verified that your potential agent is a certified member of reputable qualifying organizations, go one step further and ask if he or she is also a member of the **Caribbean Travel Organization** (CTO). Associates of this group have a particular interest in the region, and those who've completed a destination-specialist course are sure to know a lot about an island's history, culture, main tourist attractions, lodging, restaurants, and activities.

Practical Stuff

■ Money Matters

The official currency on Dominica and St. Lucia is the **Eastern Caribbean dollar** (EC$), but hotel rates are usually quoted in US dollars and most shops and restaurants accept them for payment. All EC$ bills have a similar appearance and are interchangeable, but each of the islands that uses them prints their own. Paper bills come in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 EC dollars, and coins are available in denominations of EC1¢, 2¢, 5¢, 10¢ and 25¢, as well as EC$1.

*Download and print out a **Currency Cheat Sheet** for converting Eastern Caribbean dollars into US dollars at www.oanda.com; click on "currency cheat sheet" and select Eastern Caribbean Dollar from the drop-down list.*

Eastern Caribbean currency is fixed to the US dollar, and other world currencies fluctuate according to their value in US dollars. At publication, the EC$ exchanged at a rate of US$1 = EC$2.65 or EC$1 = US$.37. By comparison, 1 Canadian dollar (CAD) = EC$1.94, 1 British Pound (GBP) = EC$4.31, 1 Australian dollar (AUD) = EC$1.76 and 1 euro (EUR) = EC$3.01. You'll be able to exchange US dollars easily on both islands, but you may find less than favorable conversion rates for other currencies.

Carry a good supply of US$1 or EC coins to use for tips. Bag handlers, taxi drivers, and small shops may claim they have no change or, even worse, offer fists full of local coins as change for large-denomination bills. In addition, be sure to keep enough cash on hand to pay your **departure tax** when you leave the island. Dominica charges departing visitors US$20/EC$50; St. Lucia's departure tax is US$22/EC$54.

■ Documentation

Dominica and St. Lucia are happy to see you, but also eager to know when you'll be departing and where you plan to go when you leave. Immigration officials will ask to see your return or onward-going **airline ticket** before they welcome you onto the island. If you plan to do a little island-hopping, be aware that inter-island ferries and airlines may refuse to sell you a ticket or allow you onboard unless you present the **return ticket** that will get you home at the end of your trip.

You'll receive an **entry card** when you clear immigration that will be stamped with either the number of days you will be on the island or the date of your departure. If you later decide to extend your visit, apply for an extension at the **immigration office** or **police station**. Also, you will probably be asked where you plan to stay, so be prepared to give some type of answer even if you don't have a reservation at one of the hotels. Officials are understandably cautious these days about nonresidents who may have unscrupulous intentions, so be patient with procedures that seem unnecessary.

A valid **passport** will speed you through immigration and customs, and with the high level of security in force throughout the world, it seems prudent for everyone to carry a passport anytime they travel outside their home country. However, Dominica and St. Lucia both allow US and Canadian citizens to enter by presenting an original document showing **proof**

of citizenship (an expired passport, a certified birth certificate, a Certificate of Citizenship, or a Certificate of Naturalization) plus a **current photo ID** such as a driver's license. You may stay on Dominica for up to 21 days and on St. Lucia for up to six months without further documentation.

Citizens of countries other than the US or Canada, and anyone planning a long visit, should check with the islands' embassy or consular office. In the US, contact the **Embassy of the Commonwealth of Dominica**, ☎ 202-364-6781; e-mail embdomdc@aol.com; the **Consulate General of Dominica**, ☎ 212-768-2480; or the **Embassy of St. Lucia**, ☎ 202-364-6792.

Get a Passport

A valid passport is always the best form of official identification for travelers. You can find out where to apply for a **US passport** by entering your zip code or state in the search box at http://iafdb-.travel.state.gov/ or call ☎ 877-487-2778. Additional information is available online at http://travel.state.gov/passport_services.html.

Canadians may get passport information by phoning ☎ 800-507-6868 or online at www.ppt.gc.ca/.

UK citizens may call the passport advice line at ☎ 0870-521-0410 or go online to www.ukpa.gov.uk and click "contact".

Australians may apply for a passport at any post office or make inquires by calling ☎ 131-232. Passport information is available online at www.passports.gov.au.

*Child abduction has become an international concern, and the islands have set up procedures at entry and exit points to curtail such illegal activity. If you plan to travel with your own minor children, carry **original documents** that prove your relationship to the child, such as a **birth certificate** or **adoption papers**. If you will be traveling with a child who is not your own, bring along a **notarized document** from the parents or legal guardians giving the child permission to travel with you. You also may be asked to present these documents when you return to your own country. Carrying proof of your relationship to a child while on vacation may prevent travel delays and inconveniences.*

Lost Documents

What should you do if your passport, money, airline tickets, or other valuables are lost or stolen while you're on Dominica or St. Lucia?

Immediately contact the **local police** and ask to make a written report. Also, contact an official at the **embassy** or **consulate** of your home country. The United States, Canada, and Australia do not have embassies or consular offices on either Dominica or St. Lucia, but visitors may get help by calling the following offices:

US citizens may contact their **Embassy** on **Barbados**, ☎ 246-436-4950, or the **Consular Agency** on **Martinique**, ☎ 596-7196-90.

Canadian citizens may call collect to their embassy back in Canada, ☎ 613-996-8885, or to the **Canadian High Commission** based on **Barbados**, ☎ 246-429-3550.

Australians may call the **Australian High Commission** based in Canada, ☎ 613-783-7665.

Citizens of the **UK** do have representation on St. Lucia and may call the **British High Commission** in the capital of Castries, ☎ 758-452-2584. British citizens visiting Dominica may contact the office on St. Lucia or the office on **Barbados**, ☎ 246-448-1000.

Citizens of other countries should check with their government representatives before leaving home for emergency contact information while on vacation in the Caribbean.

*Don't misplace the **entry card** that you receive when you clear immigration on arrival in the islands. You will be asked to return it to officials when you depart.*

■ Clearing Customs

Arriving On the Islands

You don't want to spend your vacation in jail or be denied entrance to the islands, so don't try to slip illegal drugs or unlicensed firearms through customs. Keep prescription medicines in their original, labeled containers, and if you have a legitimate need for an unusual or narcotic substance, carry a letter from your doctor giving the details.

Customs officials have the right to look through your luggage and ask about unusual articles or large quantities of items. A few possessions that

may slow or prevent your clearance through customs include more than a liter of liquor, more than 200 cigarettes, items valued at more than $250, meat, birds (living or dead), or uncertified living plants.

HOW TO COMPLAIN

US Customs officials are, for the most part, professional and friendly. However, if you think you have been treated unfairly or object to the way your taxes are calculated, ask to speak with a supervisor. Write down the badge number of everyone you deal with, in case you wish to contact higher-ranking authorities at a later date.

Returning Home

Foreign-made personal items that are taken out of the US are subject to **duty** each time they are brought back into the country. Other countries may have similar regulations, and you should check before leaving home. You can avoid the expense and inconvenience of paying duty on foreign-made items by registering watches, cameras and other valuables with the Customs Office in advance. You may also carry a dated receipt, insurance policy, or jeweler's appraisal to prove prior possession.

Each country has its own regulations for taxing and exempting purchases made by residents while traveling to a foreign destination. If you think you may buy more than a T-shirt, request a copy of *Know Before You Go* from the **US Customs Service**, ☎ 202-354-1000; the brochure is also available online at www.customs.gov.

Citizens of the UK may obtain a copy of regulations by contacting the **National Advice Service** of the **UK Customs and Excise Center,** ☎ 0845-010-9000; www.hmce.gov.uk.

Australian residents may request a copy of *Know Before You Go* from **Australian Custom Services,** ☎ 1-300-363-263 (from outside Australia, +61-2-6275-6666), or check Customs Information for Travelers on the Internet, www.customs.gov.au.

Canadians living in all provinces may get a summary of regulations by contacting the **Canada Customs and Revenue Agency**, ☎ 800-461-9999; www.ccra-adrc.gc.ca.

Citizens of other countries can find information and contact numbers on the Internet at www.taxmaninternational.tk.

*Don't get caught at the airport without cash to pay your **departure tax**. Plan to have the exact amount in either Eastern Caribbean or US dollars to prevent delays and avoid receiving change in local currency. **Dominica** charges departing visitors US$20/EC$50; **St. Lucia's** departure tax is US$22/EC$54. Children under 12 years of age are exempt.*

Suspicious Stuff

! Don't try to take more than $10,000 out of or into the US without reporting your intent to the Customs Service well in advance of travel.

Customs regulations are complicated and subject to change, so it's difficult to list specific rules, but the following generalities are offered as an unofficial guideline. Although the personal exemption for US citizens returning from most foreign destinations is $800, the duty-free limit remains at $600 if you are returning from one of the 24 Caribbean Basin countries, including Dominica and St. Lucia. (The limit is $1,200 when returning from the US Virgin Islands.) If you arrive back with new items worth more than the allowable credit, you will be charged a flat rate of 10% on the excess.

US citizens who are at least 21 years old may re-enter the country with two liters of alcohol as part of their $600 personal exemption, providing one of the liters was produced on one of the Caribbean-Basin islands. You may also bring back 200 cigarettes and 200 cigars, as long as they were not made in Cuba.

You may mail duty-free gifts to friends in the US, as long as the same person does not receive more than $100 worth of items in a single day. You do not have to declare these gifts as part of your personal exemption, but it is against federal law to send alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, and perfume containing alcohol and worth more than five dollars retail.

The bad news is, you cannot send yourself or someone traveling with you a duty-free "gift." The good news is, you don't want to. You may mail yourself a duty-free package from abroad worth up to $200 – twice as much as the gift exemption – and it does not count as part of your personal exemption. If you plan to mail yourself a package or send gifts to friends while you're out of the country, check the labeling directions in *Know Before You Go*. Boxes marked with the proper wording get through Customs much more smoothly.

Your trip through Customs will be quicker and more hassle-free if you pack all the items you buy on the islands together in the same bag. Organize your purchase receipts so that they are readily available for inspection by the officials, and remember to declare everything acquired while you were out of the country, even if it was given to you as a gift or you had it shipped home.

■ Going Metric

US citizens continue to be confused by measurements given in anything other than "American." Commit the following to memory and avoid the shame.

POUNDS VS. KILOS

At the market, if you want a pound of fruit, ask for half a kilo. Need more or less? You do the math.

1 kilogram . . . . . 2.2046 pounds
1 pound . . . . . 0.4536 kilograms

ON THE ROAD

When you buy gas, you'll need almost four liters to make a gallon. The distance from one town to the next may be 10 kilometers, but that's only a little over six miles. The numbers work out this way:

1 liter . . . . . 1.06 quarts or 0.264 gallons
1 gallon (4 quarts) . . . . . 3.8 liters
1 mile . . . . . 1.6 kilometers
1 km . . . . . 0.62 miles

TEMPERATURE

Temperature is converted from °C to °F by multiplying the Celsius temperature by nine, dividing the result by five and adding 32. Too hard? Here's about all you need to know in the Caribbean:

15°C . . . . . 59°F
20°C . . . . . 68°F
25°C . . . . . 77°F
30°C . . . . . 86°F
35°C . . . . . 95°F

■ Electricity

Electricity on Dominica and St. Lucia is 220-volt AC, 50 cycles. Newer hotels may have complete 110-volt systems, and many bathrooms in older hotels have outlets for 110-volt shavers. If you plan to use a hair dryer or other small appliance designed for 110 volts, check with your hotel about the need for a converter or plug adapter. Even dual-voltage computers and appliances may need a plug adapter, depending on which country it was sold in. Conversion devices are relatively inexpensive, so you may want to pick up a set at a travel store or electrical shop before you leave home.

See a picture of various international plugs and find voltage information by country online at www.franzus.com/voltage_guide.htm.

Be cautious about using sensitive equipment, such as computers, while on the islands. You would be wise to use a surge protector and monitor equipment for overheating. Appliances with internal clocks may not keep the correct time, and dive equipment, such as strobes, should be charged at regulated outlets available at dive shops.

■ Time

Dominica and St. Lucia are on **Atlantic Standard Time**, which is one hour later than Eastern Standard Time in the US, and four hours earlier than Greenwich Mean Time. Since the islands do not observe daylight-saving time, they are on the same time as the eastern United States during the summer.

■ Health & Safety

Crime

Dominica and St. Lucia have low crime rates, and most offenses are perpetrated by islanders against fellow islanders.

You can protect your belongings by taking simple precautions. Keep valuables locked in your hotel's **safety deposit box** or in your private **room safe**. Invest in a **waterproof pouch** that you can wear around your waist to keep your hotel key and a small amount of money safe and dry while you're at the beach or swimming pool.

Do not leave valuables in view in your rental car, even while driving. Thieves have been known to reach inside **open car windows** while cars

are stopped at intersections and make off with wallets, purses, and electronic equipment. After dark, stay in well-lighted areas that are frequented by other tourists.

Look for other helpful tips in A Safe Trip Abroad*, published by the Bureau of Consular Affairs at the Department of State. Request a copy from the Communications Office in Washington, DC,* ☎ *202-647-6575 or find it online at www.travel.state.gov/asafetripabroad.html.*

Illness

Both islands also are relatively free of disease, but you can get updated Caribbean reports from the **US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**, ☎ 404-639-3311, www.cdc.gov/travel/caribean.htm; and **The World Health Organization,** www.who.int/ith (enter the country name in the *Search* box).

Insurance

Check your existing **health insurance** and **homeowner's** policies before you consider buying additional protection for your vacation. Chances are, you're covered. If you do decide to purchase extra insurance, compare the costs and offerings of various policies online at www.insuremytrip.com.

Package policies usually provide reimbursement for trip cancellation, lost baggage, medical and dental care, and emergency evacuation. You can also buy separate policies to cover specific needs. Find a list of international and US-based medical-emergency insurers at www.travel.state.gov/medical.html.

Food & Drink

Take responsibility for your health and safety while you're on vacation by following these commonsense precautions:

Tap water on both islands is generally clean and safe to drink. However, you may want to drink **bottled water**, especially in remote areas. Bottled water is readily available, so why risk infection? Do not drink from outdoor faucets, which may be intended for irrigation only.

As a general rule, eat in **clean restaurants** with a heavy tourist trade, but keep in mind that some of the best meals are found in small family-run cafés in areas without many tourists. If the locals eat there, or recommend that you do, it's probably okay.

Avoid raw fish, undercooked meats and eggs, any prepared food sold by a street vendor, and foods that look as though they've sat on the buffet table too long. If you drink milk, or add it to your cereal, be sure it's pasteurized. Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables before eating.

Bismuth subsalicylate, the active ingredient in products such as Pepto-Bismol®, isn't the best treatment for diarrhea (Immodium Ad® is better), but it may help prevent the dreaded scourge. Research indicates that chewing a couple of the pink tablets before every meal may help deter hostile bacteria that hope to set up shop in your gastrointestinal tract. If you want to give this prophylactic strategy a try, get your doctor's okay before you leave home. Do not take products containing salicylate if you're allergic to aspirin products or are already taking blood-thinning medication.

Heat & Sun

We know you came to the islands to enjoy the sun, but Caribbean rays can burn quickly and severely. Bring along a high-SPF (sun protection factor) waterproof **sunblock** that contains zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, and faithfully spread it liberally on all body parts that will be exposed to the sun. Add **sunglasses** and a **hat** or **visor** if you're going to be out longer than a few minutes. Sunshine along the equator is strong year-round, and you may not notice that you're burning if a cool wind is blowing or there's a cloud cover. If you do get sunburned, drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration and cover reddened skin with a lotion or gel containing aloe vera. Seek medical attention if you feel dizzy or develop a fever, headache, or nausea, since these conditions may indicate **sunstroke**.

Flora & Fauna

Don't touch anything in the ocean or on land unless you know for certain what it is. Some of the most beautiful **sea creatures** and **wild vegetation** cause nasty rashes and painful abrasions.

Manchineel trees are particularly troublesome because the fruit, leaves, and sap are poisonous and cause severe skin blisters. Never stand under one during a rain storm, because sap can wash off the tree and onto you. These trees have round, shiny green leaves, and their fruit resembles a small, green apple. Those in public areas are usually marked with red paint, but be cautious in secluded spots.

Check with locals about recent **snake sightings** before you head into an unfamiliar area without a guide.

Insects

Bugs are a part of the Caribbean, especially in dense forests and around lakes. You probably won't be bothered when a breeze is blowing or in open areas during daytime, but remember that insects are drawn to sweet smells such as perfume. Wear lightweight long-sleeve tops and long pants when you hike into wooded areas. If you want extra protection, use a bug repellent containing DEET. Some people have good results with various natural repellents; vitamin B1 (thiamine), in 100 mg. tablets taken up to three times daily, is said to cause an odor on the skin that humans can't detect and insects detest. Bugs also hate the smell of chlorine, so frequent dips in the hotel pool might be a good idea.

■ Travelers With Special Needs

Several organizations offer information and assistance to older travelers and persons with health problems. If you have special needs, contact one of these groups:

■ **AARP** offers 50-and-older members discounts on airfares, hotels and rental cars; ☎ 800-424-3410, www.aarp.com.

■ **Access-Able Travel Source** is an online publication that helps make travel easier for mature and disabled people by providing information about accessibility at hotels and attractions around the world. You won't find much specifically about the Caribbean, but look for details on cruise ships, travel agents, equipment rental and packing; www.accessable.com.

■ The **Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality** is a clearinghouse for disability-access information. They publish the magazine *Open World*. ☎ 212-447-7284, fax 212-725-8253, www.sath.org.

■ ***Emerging Horizons***, a travel magazine and newsletter, is geared toward people with mobility impairment, from wheelchair users to slow walkers. It has feature articles and a section with advice on accessible tours, lodging, transportation, and recreation; www.emerginghorizons.com.

■ The **American Diabetes Association**, ☎ 800-DIABETES, www.diabetes.org; and **The Canadian Diabetes Association**, ☎ 800-BANTING, www.diabetes.ca, offer suggestions for diabetics on how to prepare for a trip and manage while on vacation. In the US alone, more than 15 million people have the disease, including almost 20% of senior citizens.

■ Student, Youth & Teacher Deals

If you're a full-time student, a teacher or professor, or anyone between the ages of 12 and 26, you qualify for an **international identity card**, which entitles you to discounts on airfare, accommodations, car rental, long-distance phone calls, and museum admissions. In addition, cardholders may purchase basic travel insurance and have access to worldwide emergency assistance. The student, youth, and teacher cards are available online at www.statravel.com or by calling ☎ 800-781-4040.

■ Getting Married

More and more couples are choosing **destination weddings**, and are walking tropical isles instead of church aisles. You can make all the arrangements before you leave home, then arrive a few days early to relax and finalize the plans. After the ceremony, you're already in place for the honeymoon.

Marriage requirements on Dominica and St. Lucia are similar and relatively simple:

- Arrive on the island **two** to **four days prior** to your wedding day.
- In addition to your **passports**, bring your **birth certificates**.
- If either the bride or groom are divorced or widowed, provide the **divorce papers** (***Decree Absolute***) or the **death certificate** for the deceased.
- If either the bride or groom have changed their name, provide the ***Deed Poll*** or **court order**.
- If either the bride or groom are under the age of 18, provide a sworn affidavit of **parental consent** stamped by a Notary Public.
- All documents must be in **English** or translated into English by a certified translator.

Costs for a **civil ceremony** will run about US$200-US$300, with **church fees** adding another US$60-US$100. Hotels and resorts have package prices for your reception and wedding-party accommodations, and you can go rock-bottom or all-out on expenses, just as at home.

Before you begin making plans and placing deposits, check with a few wedding consultants who specialize in Caribbean weddings. They can lead you safely through the hazards of getting married in a foreign country and arrange for almost any type of ceremony, reception, and honeymoon. Some to try:

- **The Wedding Experience**, ☎ 877-580-3556, www.theweddingexperience.com.

■ **Honeymoons, Inc.**, ☎ 888-811-1888, www.honeymoonsinc.com.

■ **Awesome Caribbean Weddings** (St. Lucia), ☎ 758-450-0300, www-.awesomecaribbeanweddings.com.

Getting Here

By Air

■ Major Carriers

Caribbean islands constantly vie for increased air service from Europe and the Americas. As the region grows in popularity, new carriers enter the market, and existing airlines add more flights. You can find the best fares and most direct routing by searching the Internet and calling two or three travel agents who specialize in Caribbean vacations (see *Check Those Credentials*, page 16).

If you plan to visit several islands, check into **multi-destination passes** sold by airlines such as **LIAT**, **BWIA**, and **Air Jamaica**. Costs and regulations change, but you can use the passes to see numerous islands during one extended vacation.

A Connecticut-based company called **Tour Scan** collects and evaluates about 10,000 Caribbean-vacation deals every season to come up with the best (lowest cost) option for several resorts on each island. Consider their findings before you settle on any air-accommodation package. ☎ 800-962-2080, www.tourscan.com.

■ Regional Carriers

Regional airlines fly within the Caribbean, and you can often put together a good airfare by going first to Puerto Rico or Jamaica on a major carrier, then switching to a small inter-island carrier. These airlines fly small airplanes with room for only 19 to 50 passengers, so make advance reservations.

Be ready for the unexpected when you travel within the Caribbean. Regional airlines sometimes cancel flights if they have too few passengers, and planes have been known to take off early on a whim. Confirm and reconfirm your reservations, and arrive at your gate well before the scheduled departure time. If you can avoid checking luggage, you will be more flexible when your plans suddenly change.

Airlines

■ **Air Canada**, ☎ 888-247-2262 (US/Canada), 800-744-2472 or 758-452-2550 (St. Lucia), www.aircanada.ca.

■ **Air Caraïbes**, ☎ 590-82-49-47 (based on Guadeloupe), www.air-caraibes.com.

■ **Air France**, ☎ 800-237-2747 (US), 800-667-2747 (Canada), www.airfrance.com.

■ **Air Jamaica**, ☎ 800-523-5585 (US/Canada), 0-20-8570-9171 (UK), 758-453-6611(St. Lucia), www.airjamaica.com.

■ **Air Martinique**, ☎ 758-452-2463.

■ **American Airlines/American Eagle**, ☎ 800-433-7300 (US/Canada), 758-454-6777 (St. Lucia), 767-448-0628 (Dominica), www.aa.com.

■ **British Airways**, ☎ 800-247-9297 (US), 800-268-0288(Canada), 845-773-3377 (UK), www.british-airways.com.

■ **BWIA** (British West Indies Airways), ☎ 800-538-2942 (US), 800-744-2942 (Caribbean), www.bwee.com.

■ **Caribbean Star**, ☎ 268-480-2561 (based on Antigua), 767-448-2181 (Dominica), 800-744-7827 (Caribbean); www.flycaribbeanstar.com.

■ **Continental Airlines**, ☎ 800-523-3273 (US), www.flycontinental.com.

■ **Delta Air Lines**, ☎ 800-325-1999 (US/Canada), www.delta.com.

■ **Helenair**, ☎ 758-452-1958.

■ **LIAT** (Leeward Island Air Transport), ☎ 888-844-5428 (Caribbean); 868-624-4727 (Trinidad); 758-452-3051 (St. Lucia); 767-448-2421 (Dominica); www.liatairline.com.

■ **Martinair**, ☎ 800-627-8462 (US) 416-364-3672 (Canada); www.martinair.com.

■ **Northwest Airlines**, ☎ 800-447-4747 (US); www.nwa.com.

■ **United Airlines**, ☎ 800-241-6522 (US); www.ual.com.

■ **US Airways**, ☎ 800-428-4322 (US); www.usairways.com.

■ **Virgin Atlantic**, 800-862-8621 (US), www.fly.virgin.com.

■ **Winair** (Windward Islands Airways Int'l), ☎ 767-274-8508 (Dominica), 599-545-4237 (St. Martin),800-224-4749, www.fly-winair.com.

■ Package Deals

Tour operators often set up charter flights to the islands, especially during the popular tourist seasons. You can find these flights and package vacations by searching the Internet and calling travel agents who advertise as Caribbean specialists. If you're a scuba diver, biker, or eco-traveler, check with organizations oriented to your interests for information on planned group trips.

BOOKING SERVICES

- **Apple Vacations**, www.applevacations.com. Enter your zip code to find a travel agency in your area that sells tickets/packages.
- **Funjet Vacations**, www.funjet.com.
- **GWV**, www.gwvtravel.com. You'll have to get a travel agent to make the reservation for you, but they offer direct and nonstop air from Boston, MA and Hartford, CT with hotel packages.
- **TNT Vacations**, ☎ 616-262-9200, www.tntvacations.com.
- **Trans Global Vacations**, www.tgvacations.com.

By Sea

Dozens of cruise ships sail the **Southeastern Caribbean**, and Dominica draws approximately 250,000 cruise-ship visitors each year. Most dock at the major berth on the **Bayfront** in the capital, Roseau, but the island also has smaller cruise-ship terminals at **Woodbridge Bay**, a mile north of Roseau, and at **Cabrits National Park**, on the island's northern tip. You can walk to many attractions from all the docks, and taxis and tour operators meet passengers as they disembark.

St. Lucia receives about 300,000 cruise-ship visitors each year. The main port is on the north side of the harbor in the capital, Castries, near the **Pointe Seraphine** duty-free shopping complex. You can take a water taxi from there to the **North Wharf,** in the center of town.

You can locate a cruise-travel specialist in your area by checking with the **National Association of Cruise Oriented Agencies** at www.nacoaonline.com, then click "Find a Member." NACOA is an organization of certified travel agents who have made a serious commitment to helping travelers find the cruise vacation that best suits their expectations.

You can also travel between Dominica and St. Lucia by high-speed ferry. **L'Express des Iles** is a comfortable catamaran that runs roundtrip service between Guadeloupe, Martinique, Dominica, and St. Lucia several times per week. You'll be charged a departure tax of EC$20/US$8 in addition to the ticket price, which is approximately EC$300/US$112 round-trip between St. Lucia and Dominica. For information and reservations, ☎ 758-452-2211 (St. Lucia) or 767-448-2181 (Dominica), www.express-des-iles.com/anglais.

*A Connecticut-based company called **Tour Scan** collects and evaluates about 10,000 Caribbean-vacation deals every season to come up with the best (lowest cost) option for several resorts on each island. Consider their findings before you settle on any air-accommodation package. ☎ 800-962-2080, www.tourscan.com.*

Getting Around

Both islands offer a variety of transportation options, and the one that's best for you depends as much on your temperament as on your route or destination. See *Getting Around* in each chapter for more specific information and contact numbers for local car rental agencies, taxis, and buses.

By Car

Roads are narrow, winding, mostly unsigned, sometimes unnamed, and often treacherously steep. Drivers keep to the left side (British style), but most cars are equipped for right-side driving (North-American style). If you can handle all that, a **rental car** is absolutely the best way to get around.

If you do rent a car, you will be required to buy a **temporary license**. On St. Lucia, the permit costs EC$54/US$21 and is valid for three months. On Dominica, a one month permit runs EC$30/US$12. You may purchase your license at the car-rental offices by showing either a valid license from your home country or an international driving permit.

■ Rental Agencies

■ **Avis**, ☎ 800-331-1212 (US), 800-331-1084 (International), 758-452-4554 (local), www.avis.com.

■ **Budget**, ☎ 800-527-0700 (US), 800-268-8900 (Canada), 767-449-2080 (Dominica), 758-452-0233 (St. Lucia), www.budgetrentacar.com, www.budgetstlucia.com.

■ **Hertz**, ☎ 800-654-3131 (US), 800-645-3001 (International), 758-452-0679 (St. Lucia), www.hertz.com.

■ **National,** ☎ 800-227-7368 (US), 758-450-8721 (St. Lucia), www.nationalcar.com.

By Public Transportation

Taxis are plentiful in tourist areas on both islands. Fares are not metered, but prices are set by the government. Fares can mount up quickly, and may limit your ability to explore. Ask to see a rate sheet or agree on a point-to-point fare before you get into the cab. If you have a group or don't mind sharing, flag down a minivan that holds six to eight people and divide the cost among all the passengers.

Taxi drivers are courteous, skilled, and willing to go anywhere at almost any time. Most drivers also offer **guided tours** of the island. Expect to pay around US$20 per hour for up to four people. Before you set out, be sure that you can understand the driver's speech. Some residents speak English with a heavy accent.

Drivers may add a **surcharge** to the fixed government rates for trips late in the evening and on Sundays and holidays. Expect to pay extra for transportation of heavy or oversized **luggage**, and plan to give a 10% tip for good service. US and EC dollars are accepted, but don't expect the driver to have change for large bills in either currency.

Public buses are actually privately-owned minivans that operate under government regulations. They're inexpensive, but you must be inordinately laid-back to endure the crowded seating, frequent stops, and often-unreliable schedule.

What To Pack

Pack light. Inter-island airlines have strict size and weight restrictions for luggage. If your bag is over the limit, it gets left behind. Check with your airline or travel agant to get weight and baggage limits.

■ For daytime, you need only shorts, swimsuits, sandals, and closed-toe walking shoes or hiking boots.

■ Bring a lightweight, long-sleeved shirt and long pants if you plan to visit the rainforest.

■ In the evening, you can go almost anywhere dressed in summer-weight slacks and a collared shirt. In a few of the fanciest restaurants and nightspots on St. Lucia, women may feel more comfortable in a sun dress or long skirt, and men will want to wear a dress shirt – with or without a jacket.

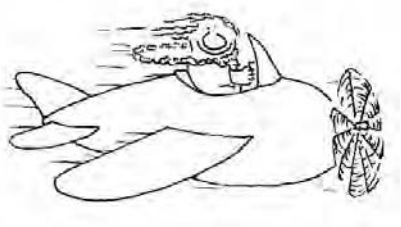
■ Caribbean nights can be cool, especially if it rains, so bring a lightweight sweater or windbreaker.

■ If you plan to hike, bike, or play tennis or golf, bring along the appropriate clothing and equipment (bicycles and golf clubs can be rented).

■ If you plan to scuba dive or snorkel, bring your own mask, fins, and snorkel. Everything else can be rented. (Don't forget your diving certification card.)

LAST-MINUTE CHECKLIST

- Passport or other proof of citizenship
- Airline tickets
- Hotel and car-rental vouchers or reservation numbers
- Camera, and more film than you think you'll need
- Sunglasses
- Sunhat or visor
- Sunblock; aloe vera after-sun gel or lotion
- Medications in original containers
- Insurance card
- Contact lenses or eyeglasses (bring a spare pair)



Dominica

What's Special About It?

Unspoiled nature runs rampant on Dominica (*Dom-i-NEE-ca*). Clean **rivers** lead to isolated **waterfalls** hidden in the dense foliage of the vast **rainforest** that covers the rugged inland mountains. Parts of the island are so fertile and wild that scientists consider them a laboratory of 10,000-year-old plant life. It's as close to the Garden of Eden as anyplace on earth; a modern Jurassic Park.

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About 75% of the island is covered by thickly wooded **mountains**, and more than a fourth is protected as **national parks** or **forest reserves**. Most visitors who come here consider themselves eco-tourists, explorers, or adventurers, and they are exactly the type of non-traditional tourist Dominica strives to please.

The Dominican government keeps a tight rein on development, so glamour and glitz are neither solicited nor welcome. Casinos, nightclubs, luxury stores, and high-rise hotels do not exist here, and officials are doing everything possible to prevent their arrival. Don't mistake this intentional refusal to court tourism at the expense of natural assets for third-world backwardness. The island has all the latest conveniences: cable television, computers, and cellular phones. However, the emphasis is on nature, and the islanders willingly do without things that can harm the environment – including tourists. Citizens won't clear the forest or surrender the waterfront for extravagant resorts, and, ironically, this blatant snub of mass tourism is precisely what makes the island so attractive.

Mountains run north-south through the middle of the island, reaching 5,000 feet. More than 300 inches of rain fall throughout the central region, creating a magnificent ecosystem of plants, animals, and insects.

The coast is mostly rocky, but there are some sand beaches, and spectacular coral reefs grow along close-in underwater volcanoes.

These are qualities not easily kept secret. Over the past decade, the sharp worldwide growth of nature-tourism and eco-tourism helped boost Dominica's popularity. Visits from cruise ship passengers grew from about 7,000 to more than 244,000, and the number of overnight tourists increased from about 30,000 to more than 75,000. Obviously, change is imminent. The message: Visit now.

Dominica is only 29 miles long and 16 miles wide, but you can't explore it quickly because of the rough terrain, narrow roads, and mountain barriers.

STATISTICS

Capital . . . . . Roseau

Climate: Average daytime temperatures range from 23°C/75°F to 29°C/85°F at sea-level year-round. It is cooler, wetter, and windier in the mountains. The driest months are January through April. Roseau and the west coast receive about 85" of rain annually, while the mountainous interior rainforest gets more than 340" per year. Expect a brief downpour at some point every day.

Language: English is the official language, but French-based Créole is spoken among the residents.

Location: In the Eastern Caribbean between 15° 12'-15° 39' North Latitude and 60° 14'-61° 29' West Longitude, between the French islands of Martinique (23 miles to the south) and Guadeloupe (30 miles to the north) in the Lesser Antilles.

Political Status: Dominica is an independent nation within the British Commonwealth.

Population: Approximately 73,000 people live on the 290-square-mile island. Most residents are of African ancestry, and about 3,000 descendants of native Carib Indians live in Carib Territory on the east coast.

The British Ordnance Survey map is available at the tourist office at the Old Market in Roseau for EC$22 / US$8.25. Basic maps are distributed free of charge at hotels and tourist offices.

Snapshots

What would you see if you flew low and slow over the island?

■ Narrow paved **highways** winding along the moderately developed western Caribbean coast and sparsely populated eastern Atlantic coast.

■ The world's largest **boiling lake** bubbling in the **Valley of Desolation**.

■ Magnificent **waterfalls** in garden spots with names such as Emerald Pool, Trafalgar, Sari Sari, and Victoria.

■ Quaint craft shops in **Carib Territory**, where a community of indigenous people make their home.

■ Foliage-covered ruins at **Fort Shirley** in **Cabrits National Park.**

■ The busy waterfront capital of **Roseau,** on the southwest coast.

■ A lovely natural harbor in the second-largest town of **Portsmouth,** on the northwest coast.

■ A high ridge of **mountains** running north/south through the center of the island.

■ The scenic **Transinsular Road** cutting east/west across the **Central Forest Reserve**.

■ Ancient **trails** running along the eastern coast leading to waterfalls, old aqueducts, and unusual geological formations.

■ Scotts Head, a beach-lover's **village** on the southern tip.

■ Photographers lined up to take pictures from the top of a promontory at the southern tip of **Soufrière Bay.**

■ **Whales** and **dolphins** following boats through calm Caribbean waters.

■ **Fishermen** reeling in prizewinning blue marlin from close-in deep-sea fishing sites.

■ **Scuba divers** and **snorkelers** gearing up to explore spectacular underwater sites with pristine reefs, dramatic pinnacles, and coral-crusted shipwrecks.

A Brief History

The First Inhabitants

Dominica's first residents came from South America. Archeological evidence suggests the first inhabitants were **Ortoiroids**, an ancient tribe of Indians that originated from the valley surrounding the Orinoco River in present-day Venezuela. Around 2000 BC, a tribe of Arawak Indians (a branch of the Taino tribe) left South America and worked their way up through the Antilles to Dominica. They were a peaceful group of artists and craftsmen who left remnants of elaborately decorated pottery as proof of their existence.

Sometime around 1000 AD, groups of South American warriors invaded and overpowered the **Arawaks**. These people, whom we now call **Caribs**, built villages controlled by chiefs and obtained food by hunting and fishing. In their native language, they called their new home ***Wai'tukubuli***, which meant "tall is her body," and referred to the island's towering mountains that jut steeply out of the ocean.

Dominica *(a small, English-speaking, independent nation) is often mistaken for the* ***Dominican Republic*** *(a large, Spanish-speaking country that shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti). Dominica (dom-inEE-ka) is located about midway down an island chain known as the Lesser Antilles, between the French islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique, while the Dominican Republic is located between Puerto Rico and Cuba, and is part of the Greater Antilles.*

European Settlement

Christopher Columbus sighted the island's magnificent mountains when he circled Wai'tukubuli with a 17-ship armada in 1493. Since it was Sunday morning, he called the island Dominica (from the Latin word *domini* meaning "the Lord's day") and wrote in his logbook: "Dominica is remarkable for the beauty of its mountains ... and must be seen to be believed." Columbus himself didn't land on Dominica that day because of the difficulty of finding a calm harbor. However, some of his men did anchor off the leeward side and reported finding people and huts. Over the next century, various European expeditions visited or passed by the island, and the sailors mentioned its outstanding beauty

in their diaries. However, the first European settlers didn't arrive until 1632.

The **French** arrived first, but were quickly followed by the **English**, resulting in a land battle that continued throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. While fighting each other, the Europeans also had to contend with the Caribs. Increasingly larger European troops were sent to the island and gradually the Caribs were driven inland and subdued.

Britain was granted rights to Dominica in the **Treaty of Paris** in 1763. Within 10 years, they had surveyed all the land, established towns, brought in slaves from Africa to work the plantations, opened free ports, and elected officials. The French continued to be an important part of island life, and vied for political power at every opportunity. In 1778, while the English were distracted by the American Revolution, French troops seized the island and remained in control until the **Treaty of Versailles** returned British rule in 1783.

Napoleon, always looking for a place to stir up trouble, invaded Dominica in 1805. His troops burned the capital city and held government officials hostage while they attempted to establish control. After several days, the French forces agreed to accept a large bribe to leave the island, and the British resumed business as usual. Their most immediate concern was unrest and uprisings among the African slaves.

■ Slavery & The Maroons

For years, Dominica had been a refuge for escaped slaves called **Maroons**. Some fled from local plantations, but large numbers of them came from neighboring islands. Dominica's dense, mountainous forests provided the perfect hideout for the slaves, who formed guerilla armies for protection. While the French and English fought each other and the native Caribs, they also had to fight off attacks from the Maroons, who had the advantage of escaping into the forest if a battle got rough. When France declared a brief end to slavery on their islands from 1794 until 1802, Maroons joined French forces, and French whites supported Maroon guerilla raids in a united front against English plantation owners and the British militia.

In 1814, the Maroons were overwhelmed by British troops, and their leaders were publicly executed. Many slaves returned to their work on the plantations, but it was too late to save the island's coffee and sugar trade. By the time all slaves were freed in 1834, Dominica was in a deep economic depression, and traditional plantations were struggling.

In 1902, the Carib Indians were granted a large parcel of land on Dominica's northeast coast. Today it is known as **Carib Territory** and inhabited by approximately 3,000 natives. It is the largest settlement of indigenous people in the Caribbean.

Independence

With the end of slavery, conditions were right for the emergence of a new middle class. During the last years of the 19th century, Dominica became a modern farming and fishing community. Limes and cocoa were among the first new industries, followed by a thriving banana boom. Foreign investment and aid allowed improvement in public services and a sturdy infrastructure developed.

Gradually, Dominica took steps to become autonomous. It was declared a self-governing British possession in 1967, and all foreign ties were cut in 1978 when the island became an independent republic within the British Commonwealth. Today, the government is headed by a president elected by the House of Assembly and a prime minister who leads the Cabinet of Ministers. A general election is held every five years.

Dominica is the result of its past – totally free and independent, but deeply affected by the history that made it so. The government is British, but the citizens are predominantly of African decent. The cuisine tends to be Créole with unequivocal French twists. The official language is English, but the people speak a French-based patois. Streets and villages are named a hodgepodge of English and French words, but the culture and spirit are undeniably African and Amerindian.

Travel Information

Documentation

Citizens of the US and Canada may visit Dominica for up to 21 days by showing an official form of citizenship, such as a **passport** or a **certified birth certificate**, plus a valid government-issued **photo ID**. Visitors from most other countries must present a valid **passport** and may need a **visa**. All visitors are required to have a **return** or **ongoing ticket**.

Getting Here

By Air

Dominica has two airports: **Melville Hall** (DOM), on the remote northeast coast, and **Canefield** (DCF), near the capital city on the west coast. Melville Hall is the major airport, although it is inconveniently located,

while Canefield serves as the base for small regional airlines. Neither airport currently has a runway long enough to accommodate standard jets, but the government is searching for funds to expand and improve Melville Hall so that it can receive larger aircraft.

If you arrive at Melville Hall, expect more than an hour's drive to hotels in the west coast tourist areas. It's a beautiful ride along good roads that travel through the rainforest. Cab fare will cost about EC$50/US$18, if you share with three other passengers. On your own, expect to pay around EC$135/US$50. Consider renting a car at the airport, since the daily charge will likely be about the same as taking a taxi to your hotel. Canefield is only a 15 minute drive from most hotels, and the taxi fare to your hotel will run about EC$40/US$15.

Porters work for tips at both airports. Don't be surprised if someone takes your bags as you clear customs. The usual tip is US$1 per bag.

Despite the lack of jet service, getting here is relatively easy. You can fly nonstop from several US gateway cities to **Puerto Rico**, **Barbados**, **Antigua**, **St. Lucia**, or **St. Martin**. From there, regional carriers fly turboprops to both Melville Hall and Canefield.

LOCAL AIRLINES

(The telephone number for the nearest Caribbean office is given for airlines that do not have offices on Dominica.)

Air Canada . . . . . ☎ 590-211-277 (Guadeloupe)
Air France . . . . . ☎ 590-51-02-02 (Dutch St. Maarten)
Air Guadeloupe . . . . . ☎ 767-448-2181 or 767-449-1060
Air Jamaica . . . . . ☎ 800-523-5585 (US and Caribbean)
American Eagle . . . . . ☎ 767-448-0628 or 767-445-7207
BWIA . . . . . ☎ 599-545-646 (French St. Martin)
British Airways . . . . . ☎ 268-462-0876 (on Antigua)
Cardinal Airlines . . . . . ☎ 767-449-8923
Caribbean Star . . . . . ☎ 800-744-7827 (Caribbean)
. . . . . 268-480-2561 (Antigua)
Continental . . . . . ☎ 800-231-0856 (Puerto Rico)
LIAT . . . . . ☎ 767-448-2422 or 888-844-5428

By Sea

L'Express des Iles operates regular service between Dominica's capital city, **Roseau**, and the islands of **Guadeloupe**, **Martinique**, and **St. Lucia** via 300-passenger catamarans. The Guadeloupe and Martinique trips take about 90 minutes, but the weekends-only voyage to St. Lucia is three and a half hours. One-way fares are about EC$107/ US$40 to Guadeloupe, EC$120/US$45 to Martinique, and EC$157/ US$59 to St. Lucia. For information and reservations, contact Whitchurch Travel ☎ 767-448-2181, fax 767-448-5787, www.whitchurch.com/express.htm.

Most **cruise ships** dock either at the new pier in the center of Roseau or on the northwestern coast at Cabrits National Park. Both are ideal locations, since passengers can walk to many attractions. A few ships come into the commercial deepwater port north of Roseau, and passengers are shuttled into town. Tourist offices near all three ports open when ships arrive to help passengers plan sightseeing tours.

Getting Around

By Car

Visitors from non-British countries are usually advised against renting a car on Dominica because of the left-hand-drive problem. However, if you're confident that you can handle driving steep, narrow, winding roads on the "wrong" side, there's no better way to explore the island. Rental cars may be equipped for either right- or left-hand drive, so if you have a preference, make your request when you book your car.

A local **driving permit** is required, (EC$30/US$12), and most rental companies issue them on-site when you pick up your car. You can also obtain one from the Vehicle Licensing Department on High Street in downtown Roseau. Visiting drivers must be 25 to 65 years old with a valid driver's license and at least two years of driving experience.

The **speed limit** in towns and villages is 20 mph, and although there is no posted speed limit in the countryside, narrow roads and frequent curves require caution. The primary routes are in good condition. Secondary roads tend to have potholes and an occasional fallen tree limb, but rarely become unmanageable. However, a four-wheel-drive vehicle is a great convenience on much of the island and a must in remote areas. Gas stations are only in the larger villages, but the island is so small, you're never far from a fill-up.

CAR RENTAL COMPANIES

Best Deal Rent-A-Car, ☎ 767-449-9204 or 767-235-3325, fax 767-449-9207, www.avirtualdominica.com/bestdeal/.

Budget Car Rental, ☎ 767-449-2080 or 767-235-2080 (cell), fax 767449-2694, www.avirtualdominica.com/budget/.

Bonus Rentals, ☎ 767-448-2650, www.avirtualdominica.com/bonus.htm.

Courtesy Car Rental, ☎ 767-445-7677 or 767-235-7763 (cell), fax 767-448-7733, www.avirtualdominica.com/courtesycarrental.

Garraway Rent-A-Car, ☎ 767-448-2891, fax 767-448-0541, www.avirtualdominica.com/garrawaycarrental.htm.

Silver Lining Car Rental, ☎ 767-445-3802 or 767-235-5502, fax 767445-3802, http://users.cwdom.dm/silverlining/.

During high season, expect to pay around EC$120/US$45 per day to rent a typical compact car with manual transmission and no air conditioning. From there, rates go up to about EC$160/US$60 per day for a fully equipped four-wheel-drive vehicle. Weekly and low-season rates usually are less.

By Bus

The island's bus system is either terrific or terrible, depending on your mood and general outlook on life. Buses are actually privately-owned minivans that stop to pick up passengers at red road signs – or wherever they want – maybe.

They are filled – usually to overflowing – with school kids, laborers, and women loaded down with shopping bags. For a dollar or two in fare, you get up-close-and-personal with the locals while zooming around hairpin curves on narrow mountain roads accompanied by booming reggae music. It's a great way to bond with friendly, fearless people.

Buses leaving Roseau and traveling south to Scotts Head (EC$4/US$1.50) depart from the **Old Market Plaza**. Buses going north to Portsmouth (EC$8/US$3) depart from the **West Bridge**; those going inland to Trafalgar Falls (EC$2.75/US$1) and Laudat (EC$3.50/US$1.50) leave from the **Botanical Gardens**.

Don't count on buses at night, on Sunday, or in remote areas. Check the schedule posted at the tourist office (☎ 767-448-2045) near the cruise ship dock in Roseau, or ask at your hotel's reception desk about bus stops and frequency of service.

Locals frequently hitchhike, but we don't recommend it for vacationers. Check the license plate of any vehicle stopping to pick you up, even at a designated bus stop; a legitimate bus will have an "**H**" or "**HA**" as a prefix before the number. If you're driving, don't stop to pick up people you don't know.

By Taxi

Taxis meet cruise ships and airplanes when they arrive on the island. The letters "**HA**" or "**H**" on a license tag designate an authorized taxi, and standard rates are set by the government. Drivers will usually accept US dollars as well as Eastern Caribbean dollars (EC) from passengers arriving by ship or airplane, so be certain you know which currency the driver is quoting before you get into the taxi. The only catch is, drivers are allowed to charge per person, and may carry four passengers in a car and up to 15 in a van. If you prefer a private taxi, be prepared to pay extra; in some cases, the driver may want to charge the rate he would receive if all available seats were occupied. Negotiate and confirm the fare before you get into the cab.

Since Melville Hall Airport is on the opposite side of the island from the major towns, taxi rates can be expensive. Count on EC$43/US$16 per person to **Roseau** and EC$32/US$12 to **Portsmouth** via the Transinsular Road. Some drivers may try to take the longer coastal roads and charge more, so settle on the route and charge before you leave the airport. **Canefield Airport** is near Roseau, and a private taxi ride into town runs about EC$21/US$8.

Taxis are also available for **sightseeing tours** at a rate of about EC$48/US$18 per hour, per car, for up to four passengers. Some taxi drivers are excellent guides and will take you to places not commonly seen on organized group tours. However, request a knowledgeable driver from your hotel or the Dominica National Tourist Organization (☎ 767-448-2045), be sure that he speaks English clearly, and go over your expectations and his fees before you set out. Tip your driver 10% for just getting the job done and more for doing it well.

Festivals, Events & Holidays

Dominicans have a distinct culture made up of eclectic-Créole and historic-Carib traditions, which is wonderfully conspicuous and delightfully celebrated. At every opportunity, the inherently jovial people dress up in costumes and come out into the streets to join a parade, dance, and sing. All festivities include plenty of island-made food and drink, and visitors are welcome to join in. Since most villages commemorate feast days for their patron saints, and several island-wide events take place every year, it's likely your visit will coincide with some cause for revelry.

For a complete list with exact dates of this year's special events, contact the **Dominica National Tourist Organization** in New York City, ☎ 888-645-5637 or 212-949-1711, fax 212-949-1714, or on Dominica at ☎ 767-448-2045, fax 767-448-5840, www.dominica.dm/festivals/.

HOLIDAY CALENDAR

ANNUAL BANK CLOSING DAYS

January 1 . . . . . New Year's Day
May 1 . . . . . May Day
First Monday in August . . . . . August Monday
November 3 . . . . . Independence Day
November 4 . . . . . Community Service Day
December 26 . . . . . Boxing Day

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Shrove Monday & Tuesday . . . . . February
Carnival . . . . . February
Ash Wednesday . . . . . February
Good Friday . . . . . March or April
Easter Sunday & Monday . . . . . March or April
Whit Sunday & Monday (**Pentecost**) . . . . . March or April
Christmas Day . . . . . December 25

Carnival

Tradition erupts in full costume during Carnival, the biggest festival of the year. Officially, the holidays are Shrove Monday and Tuesday (the two days before Ash Wednesday), but partying begins at least two weeks earlier with music concerts, dance shows, and elections for king and queen. Carnival on Dominica is less commercialized than others in the Caribbean, but it is no less lively. Programs feature a unique mix of English/French Catholic traditions with African rituals and indigenous Carib customs to create an event that is truly original.

The opening parade is one of the most popular attractions of Carnival, and thousands of onlookers gather to watch the bands, cheerleaders, and flamboyant floats. Islanders often dress in colorful *Sensay* costumes to signify their African heritage, and the streets boom with the drum-heavy sound of Créole music and patois. As Ash Wednesday approaches, Carnival winds down with two nonstop days of street parties.

UPCOMING CARNIVAL DATES

2004	February 23-24
2005	February 7-8
2006	February 27-28
2007	February 19-20
2008	February 4-5

The traditional Sensay *costume originated in Africa. It incorporates a bodysuit made of layered strips of brightly colored cloth, and makes the wearer look somewhat like* Sesame Street*'s Big Bird. A Halloween-style mask with horns and a pointed beak-nose turns the Sensay's face into a freakish sight, and platform shoes elevate the character to super-human heights.*

Independence Day

Dominicans celebrate independence as energetically as Carnival. The **third of November** – the island's equivalent of Fourth of July – has double meaning to the locals because their island was first sighted by Columbus on that date in 1493, and centuries later became an independent republic on that date in 1978. A double-good reason to bring out the bands!

As with Carnival, all aspects of the mixed cultures are flaunted spiritedly throughout the island. Beginning in late October (Dominicans always like to get a head start on festivities), villages challenge each other in folklore, dance, and music competitions. Everyone dresses up in their best traditional outfits for these contests, and it's a great time to see the women and girls in bright madras hats and elaborately decorated petticoats under colorful skirts.

On the Friday before the third of November, the entire island observes **Créole Day**, a chance for everyone to wear national costumes, speak Créole (even the radio stations broadcast in the dialect), and eat spicy food. If you happen to be visiting during this time, try to learn a few Créole greetings and attend one of the fund-raising lunches hosted by a church or community group.

The hoopla peaks on Independence Day when *jing-ping* bands hit the streets with booming music, parties break out in every neighborhood, uniformed troops parade through the capital, local artists display their work, and everyone capable of standing upright is expected to dance the polka. A bit of reason returns on **National Day of Community Service**, November 4, when all citizens turn out to complete approved community projects in a single day.

DOMFESTA

If you visit during June, you may come across undiscovered talent at the **Dominica Festival of Creative Arts** – DOMFESTA. Local performing and visual artists display their skills in a variety of presentations and workshops. Adults and children take part, and events are held in several villages as well as the capital so as many people as possible can participate. One of the most popular shows is the **Dance and Steel Festival** where dancers, choreographers, and steel bands put together solo, duet, and group performances. In addition, there are concerts put on by the best community bands and orchestras, art exhibits, and readings by Dominica's leading poets. DOMFESTA culminates with the **Golden Drum Award Ceremony**, which pays tribute to Caribbean talent and creativity.

Dive Fest

You don't have to be a scuba diver to have a great time at Dive Fest. The festival is sponsored by **The Dominican Watersports Association** in July, and special events are held island-wide. If you're a certified diver, you can participate in organized group dives to some of the most pristine underwater sites in the world.

If you're not certified, but think you might like to try it, you can join a Discover Scuba group for a free introduction from the experts. In addition, there are snorkeling lessons and tours; kayaking and canoeing lessons; races and tours; swimming competitions; whale and dolphin watching tours aboard glass-bottom boats; deep-sea fishing excursions; and dinner cruises. In the evenings, everyone gets together for happy hours, buffet dinners, steel-band shows, and dancing. On the final night, a grand finale party takes place on the beach.

World Créole Music Festival

Dominica is quickly becoming known as a stage for Créole music from around the world. The first World Créole Music Festival took place on the island in 1997 and was so successful that it became an annual cultural event. All types of Créole-style music are featured, including cadence-lypso, compas, zouk, bouyon, and soukous.

If you're a music enthusiast, plan to visit during this festival. It's a tremendous opportunity to see some of the best Créole musicians in the world play a mix of their most popular songs. Even people who arrive without a clue about the latest wave in soul-jarring, heart-pounding Créole beats often stay late into the night having the time of their lives.

CREOLE MUSIC DEFINED

If you don't know *zouk* about *Zydeco*, look over the following terms before you visit the islands.

■ **Calypso** was started by slaves in Trinidad in the 18th century as a way to entertain themselves while they worked. The lyrics were sung in patois so the white masters couldn't understand them. Although modern songs are usually sung in English, the words still mock society with jabs at politics and sex. Calypso competitions are a standard part of Carnival.

■ **Compas** comes from Haiti's national dance music, which is also called *Konpa*, *Con Pah*, or *Kompas*. This is an easily recognized sound with a beat that makes feet move involuntarily. Lyrics are sung in Spanish, French, English, and Créole.

■ **Rara**, another popular dance music from Haiti, has a mesmerizing drum beat taken from traditional voodoo rituals.

■ **Merengue** is the dance music from the Dominican Republic that recently became a worldwide sensation. Since Haiti and the Dominican Republic share the island of Hispaniola, compas and merengue have a lot in common.

■ **Biguine/beguine** became popular in the 1930s when the exciting Afro-French bolero dance rhythm was created on Martinique.

■ **Kadans** is the Créole spelling of a music genre that mixes calypso, mazouk, and beguine. *Kadans rampa* and *kadans dous* are two types of kadans.

■ **Soukous** comes from the African Congo and has a forceful bass, rapid rhythm, and quick guitar sounds.

■ **Ska** came out of Jamaica in the 1950s and combines calypso with blues and African folk songs.

■ **Reggae** was made popular by Bob Marley, who mixed ska with calypso and rock. The lyrics usually have a social message and the beat is infectious.

■ **Cadence-lypso** started in the mid-1970s when Dominican musician Gordon Henderson and his band, Exile One, mixed calypso with a Haitian sound called compas and the US music known as funk. This new beat revived worldwide interest in Créole music and caused a wave of original sounds to pour out of the Caribbean and South America.

■ **Rapso** combines calypso and rap.

■ **Chutney** combines calypso with the traditional sounds of music from India.

■ **Steel Pan** came out of Trinidad in the 1940s when the bottoms of old steel oil drums were hammered out to create drums with various pitches. This music is instantly associated with the islands, and steel-pan drummers play on beaches, street corners, and resort terraces throughout the Caribbean.

■ **Soca** puts soul into calypso to create a heavy-on-the-bass sound that originated in Trinidad in the 1970s.

■ **Pan Jazz** is a fairly recent mixing of jazz and steel pan.

■ **Zouk** has been affected by worldwide music styles, including Latin American salsa and mambo, Haitian cadence, African soukous, and North American funk. It has been called an Afro-Caribbean mix tempered by Euro-Western influence.

■ **Bouyon** is the newest music to come out of the Caribbean. It was started by a Dominica-based band known as Windward Caribbean Kulture or WCK and features electronically generated sounds with pounding drums and a prominent keyboard.

■ **Funk** – well, you know what funk is – it's the United States' soul-age contribution to world music.

If you still can't grasp the differences, don't worry – be happy. Just know that when you hear music with a rich beat that sends a message from the very roots of the earth and causes your hips to sway involuntarily, it's called Créole.

Touring The Island

On Foot

■ Roseau Walking Tour

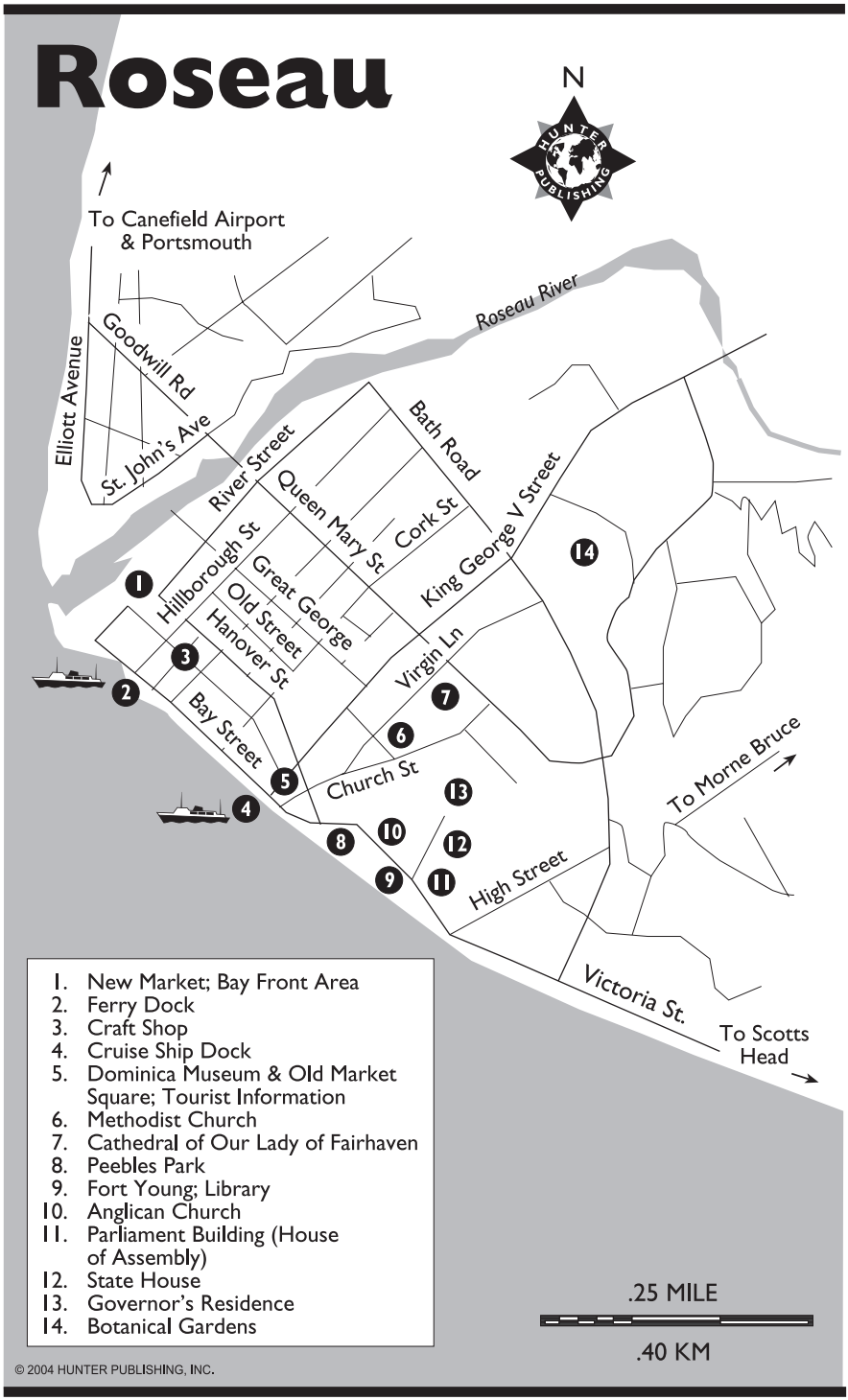
The capital city, Roseau, is a busy, pastel-colored oasis. It is set down beside the Roseau River on a rare stretch of flat land at the foot of Morne Bruce, near the southern end of the west coast.

Old Market Square (now called Dawbiney Market Plaza by those who can remember to do so) is the center of activity, and **Tourist Information** is dispensed from the original **Market House**, which was built in 1810.

Hurricane David damaged much of the waterfront in 1979, and provided an ideal opportunity for the city to clean up and update. A seawall now reduces the chance of future storm damage, and land in front of it has been reclaimed, beautified, and given a snappy name – **Bay Front**. In addition, a new jetty has been built to replace the old one and provide facilities for small boats and ferry services.

Beyond the seawall, a **cruise-ship dock** allows passengers to step directly from the ship into the bustle of the city. A noisy, jostling crowd cheerfully browses through crafts, T-shirts, and island-made products at the **Old Market** across from the dock**.** A **New Market** at the north end of Bay Front near the river is a swarm of brightly dressed vendors and buyers hovering over produce spread on mats under multicolored umbrellas. Permanent, covered stalls provide additional space, but the outdoor sellers seem to attract the most buyers. Visit the markets on Friday or Saturday mornings for the best selection.

The old post office, near Old Market Square, has been turned into the **Dominica Museum**, which tells the island's story through photographs, exhibits of Arawak pottery and tools, and a replica of a Carib hut. There's a good view of the town from the second-floor balcony, and while the museum is small, it contains a nicely arranged collection. Visit weekdays between 9am and 4pm, and Saturday from 9am to noon. Admission is EC$5/US$2; ☎ 767-448-8923.



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At the south end of Bay Front, Victoria Street climbs past **Peebles Park** to **Fort Young** and **St. George Anglican Church.** The fort was built in 1770 by Sir William Young, the island's first British governor, and enlarged by the French between 1778 and 1783. Since 1964, it has been a hotel, and ongoing construction has repaired hurricane damage and added new rooms and facilities. Across the street, the Regency-style Anglican church has suffered major damage from hurricanes since it was founded in 1820. Hurricane David gutted the structure and it lost some of its architectural style when it was restored, but the gray-stone church is still worth seeing. If you can get inside, notice the wooden ceiling, stone floor, and stained glass on the altar.

Next door, **State House** (called Government House on older maps) is surrounded by a garden. Before Dominica became an independent nation, the house was the residence and offices of the governor and is now used for state receptions and community affairs. The official-looking building to the south is the **House of Assembly**, constructed in 1811 in Georgian-Colonial style on land where the island legislature has met since 1765.

King George V Street is the major east/west road through town, and it is lined with balconied restaurants and shops. Find it off Bay Front between the tourist office and Royal Bank of Canada, and follow it up toward Morne Bruce Hill to the **Botanical Gardens**. This 40-acre garden planted on a former sugarcane field thrives on approximately 85 inches of rain each year, and while some of the oldest vegetation has been destroyed by hurricanes, there are still 500 species of trees and plants to see. Take time to visit the **aviary** to view endangered Jaco and Sisserou parrots (they are bred in a research area behind the exhibition cages, but the lab is not open to the public), and get a reality check at the monument to Hurricane David – a crushed school bus trapped under a giant baobab tree that was uprooted by the 1979 storm.

A loop road through the Botanical Gardens allows auto traffic to enter from Bath Road and Trafalgar Road (an extension of King George V Street). There's no admission charge, and the gardens are open daily, 9am to 4pm.

The **Cathedral of Our Lady of Fair Haven** (☎ 767-448-2837) is built on a hill next to the **Methodist Church** on Virgin Lane. The two churches are not particularly interesting unless you're a history or architecture buff, but the story that surrounds them is. In 1766, after the British took Dominica from the French, King George III granted the Catholics a 99-year lease on 10 acres of land on the hill above Roseau. A thatched-hut church was built immediately, but it took more than 100 years for the Catholics to complete a cathedral constructed of cut volcanic stone in the Gothic-Romanesque Revival style.

When the 99-year lease ended, the Catholics asked for a freehold grant for the land on which their cathedral was built. The British readily approved the grant, but there was a complication. Two sections of the 10 acres had been sublet to parishioners who had converted to Methodism, and they had given the **Wesleyan Methodist Mission** permission to build on these two lots. For years, there was ecumenical unrest, but the two churches and their congregations are now friendly neighbors.

Of the two buildings, the cathedral is the most interesting. The windows are Gothic, with stained glass in the pointed upper arcs – one dedicated to Christopher Columbus; the pulpit was built by prisoners confined on Devil's Island; and there are Victorian murals behind the side altars. You'll have greater respect for the structure when you realize that it was built in segments by islanders who worked on it at night after their day jobs ended.

You can get a panoramic view of the town and the coast, all the way to Scotts Head, from **Morne Bruce Hill**. If you have a car, drive south on Bath Road, which is the western boundary of the Botanical Gardens; or amble up **Jack's Walk**, which begins near the aviary and the east entrance to the gardens and climbs steeply up the hill. At the top, in addition to a terrific view, you'll find a fine residential area and a couple of small inns.

By Car

■ South End

Roseau to Scotts Head

You'll have to take two routes to explore the island south of Roseau because no single road follows the southernmost coast. Leave the capital on the coast road in the direction of Charlotte Ville and Castle Comfort, where you find several small hotels along the rocky shore. When you reach the village of Loubiere, you can cut across the mountains to Grand Bay and Petite Savane or stay along the waterfront all the way to Scotts Head.

Highlights

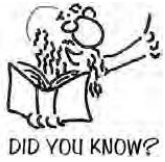
- Sulfur springs and a charming stone church in **Soufrière**
- The beach and underwater sites at **Scotts Head**
- Views from the cliffs around **Grand Bay**

The coastal road south of the fishing village of Loubiere takes you through lovely countryside to **Soufrière Bay**. Stop here to see the murals of vil-

lage life painted on the walls of the Catholic church that has stood near the beach since King George III was ruler of England. Nearby, fishermen build lobster traps and work on their colorful boats, and kids from the village play in surf warmed by hot springs. The town is now known for its lively street parties. The town was once the site of sugar and lime juice factories, and you can visit the remains of the old buildings if they interest you, but there's not much to see.

From the edge of the village, near the school, you can drive less than a mile inland to the **Sulfur Springs** and hot water pools. French soldiers once relaxed in baths built around the springs, and today islanders use the steamy waters for bathing and washing clothes. It's possible to hike into the mountains from here to **Tête Morne**, where you'll have a sensational view of Grand Bay on the Atlantic coast.

Back on the coast highway, heading south from Soufrière, you soon come to **Scotts Head**. This is one of the prettiest bits of land on the island. A narrow strip of land connects the lively fishing village of Scotts Head with the southernmost promontory tip of the island where **Fort Cachacrou** once stood. Most of the fort has long ago crumbled and fallen into the ocean, but you can climb to the top of the peninsula for an awesome view in every direction – Martinique, 20 miles to the south; the coast of Dominica, to the north; and the meeting of the Atlantic and the Caribbean, to the east.



Cachacrou is a Carib word that means "that which is being eaten by the sea." You'll appreciate the appropriateness of the name when you see the peninsula.

A narrow sandy beach fronts the marine reserve that protects the underwater environment between **Point Cachacrou** (the headland that is now often called Scotts Head as well, since the fort no longer exists) and **Anse Bateaux**, north of Soufrière. Snorkeling and scuba diving are outstanding here, and gorgeous coral reefs grow close to shore on underwater volcanoes.

***Scotts Head** is named after Captain Scott, an English soldier who helped snatch the island from the French in 1761. Don't believe stories about a Scotsman who was beheaded by the Caribs here. They're not true.*

Loubiere to Petite Savane

The coastal road ends at Scotts Head, so if you want to drive to the southern villages and on the east side of the mountain, you must return to Loubiere (about a 15-minute trip) where the road divides. A turn to the east (right when heading toward Roseau) will take you inland up a steep road lined with fern and bamboo.

At **Bellevue Chopin**, high on the mountain, there are wonderful views of Roseau. You can hike to **Morne Anglais** from here, but it's a long, steep climb, and you may want to continue down to the village of **Berekua** on **Grand Bay**. Another trail up Morne Anglais originates in the village of **Giraudel**, inland from Castle Comfort just south of Roseau.

Land in this area, at the remote southeast end of the island, has always been used for agriculture. At one time, large plantations sprawled across the region, and you can visit old lime factories and sugar mills. One of the most interesting is the mill at **Geneva Estate,** which is the setting for parts of novels by Dominica-born writer Jean Rhys, author of the popular *Wide Sargasso Sea.* It's located on the road between Berekua and Petite Savane, along with others at Stowe and Bagatelle, near Fond St. Jean.

Artisans lay tall reeds from the larouma *plant on the mountain road around Pichelin, east of Bellevue Chopin, to allow them to dry before being braided into straw mats. It's okay to drive over them as the reeds are rigid and your car will do no damage.*

The headlands at both ends of Grand Bay, **Pointe Tanama** on the west and **Carib Point** on the east, were once fortified to protect the island from attack. You can explore along these cliffs to find ruins of the old forts and take in sweeping views of the bay. Another fantastic viewpoint is from **Tête Morne**, reached by a steep road at the west end of L'Allay, the main village street. When the road ends, you can walk up the hill to the lookout. The jagged path down the other side leads to the sulfur springs above the village of Soufrière.

In the village of Grand Bay, the most interesting site is the church that was founded by the Jesuits in the early 1700s. The bell tower has been relocated to a hilltop so its sound can carry over a wider area. In the cemetery, you will see the oldest crucifix on the island, which was carved from a solid block of stone about 1720.

Continuing east, you drive along the cliffs with terrific views of the surf breaking below the villages of Stowe and Dubuc. Farther on, you come to **Petite Savane**, where descendants of the first French settlers produce bay oil and rum. Don't miss the cricket field here. The boundary line hugs

the edge of a cliff above the Atlantic Ocean. A road connects Petite Savane with the village of Delices, but it is quite steep and the mountains plunge sharply into the ocean, so you may want to skip the adventure. Hikers can take a trail that leads up to **Morne Paix Bouche** with good views of the east coast at Pointe Mulatre.

■ West Coast

Roseau to Capucin Cape

The Caribbean coast is drier than the central mountains or windward east coast, so temperatures tend to be a bit warmer and vegetation is somewhat scrubbier. Dominica's two main cities, Roseau to the south and Portsmouth to the north, are connected by a road that is literally hacked out of the mountainside at some points. Quaint villages dot the shoreline, and inland detours lead to lush valleys and lofty rainforests.

Highlights

- Pretty seaside **fishing villages**
- Snorkeling at **Rodney's Rock**
- Picture-taking on the grassy banks of **Layou River**
- Side trips into the **Northern Forest Reserve**
- A boat trip on **Indian River**
- Exploring **Fort Shirley** and **Cabrits National Park**

Take **Queen Mary Street** across the river in Roseau and drive north up **Goodwill Road** following the coast. Just before Canefield Airport, you'll spot the **Old Mill Cultural Centre.** Stop in to view exhibits of traditional handicrafts and paintings by well-known local artists. Haitian sculptor Louis Desiree runs the **Woodcarving Training School** at the center, and his students' works are displayed at the Old Mill.

The cultural center is in a converted sugar mill on the grounds of an old plantation, and the original water wheel that was used to drive the sugar press is still there. The runway at Canefield Airport now cuts through land once planted with sugar. The center houses the offices of the **Arawak House of Culture**, a **folk research center**, a **sculpture workshop**, an **art gallery**, and a **dance studio**; ☎ 767-449-1804 or 449-3075, www.culturedominica.com.

On the north side of the airport, the small village of **Massacre** is named after the slaughter of 80 Caribs by British troops in a battle that took

place there in 1674. The incident is particularly memorable because of the human-interest story attached to it.

In the mid 1600s, Sir Thomas Warner, an Englishman who presided as governor over the jurisdiction of St. Kitts, fathered two sons – one by a Carib woman from Dominica, and the other with his English wife. When the governor died, his Carib son left St. Kitts and moved to his mother's native island where he soon became a Carib chief. As fate would have it, the other son, Philip Warner, became commander of the British troops on St. Kitts.

When Dominican Carib tribes staged repeated raids on St. Kitts, Colonel Philip Warner was chosen to lead a retaliation attack on Dominica. According to legend, Colonel Warner contacted his brother, Carib Warner (a.k.a. Indian Warner), and arranged to meet him on Pringles Bay on the west coast of Dominica for a dinner gathering. The brothers, accompanied by their troops, enjoyed a large feast before Colonel Warner attacked Chief Warner and stabbed him to death. This signaled the English troops to attack and slaughter the Carib tribe. You can get a good view of the bay and shoreline where the massacre occurred from the attractive Catholic chapel poised on a hill in the village.

Mahaut and **Belfast** are rather cluttered commercial areas where Dominica Coconut Products manufactures soaps and cosmetics from coconut oil. The factory was recently acquired by US companies and is responsible for processing all the coconuts grown on the island. (Palmolive is perhaps the most recognized brand name.) In addition, rum is made at the nearby D-Special Rum Distillery, so the two towns are important to the island's economy, but of little interest to tourists.

Watch on the left, about a mile north of the factories, for **Rodney's Rock**. The black lava outcropping sits majestically off the coast and deserves a legend – even an undocumented one. The locally accepted tale is that Sir George Rodney, admiral of the British troops assigned to Dominica, fooled and diverted an invading French fleet in April 1782 by hanging lanterns on the massive rock to make it appear that a British warship was anchored offshore. Whether the legend is true or not, Rodney's Rock is a terrific photo opportunity.

Frogfish and seahorses are common in the calm water around Rodney's Rock and the nearby shallow reef. Plan to spend some time snorkeling near the shore, and watch for the huge crabs that give this stretch of coast the name ***Crab City****.*

Continuing north, the road crosses the **Layou**, the longest river on the island, and passes by **Mero** beach, a fine swimming and snorkeling spot between the villages of St. Joseph and Salisbury.

Turn inland along the river for a detour up the **Layou Valley**. This area was flooded in 1997 when an enormous landslide dumped tons of dirt from the island's interior into the river forming dirt barriers. When the lower two dams burst, the valley flooded and the upper dam created a large pool. Ask at the Layou River Hotel (☎ 767-449-6081) for directions to hiking trails and scenic secondary roads in the area. The area is incredibly lovely with lush vegetation.

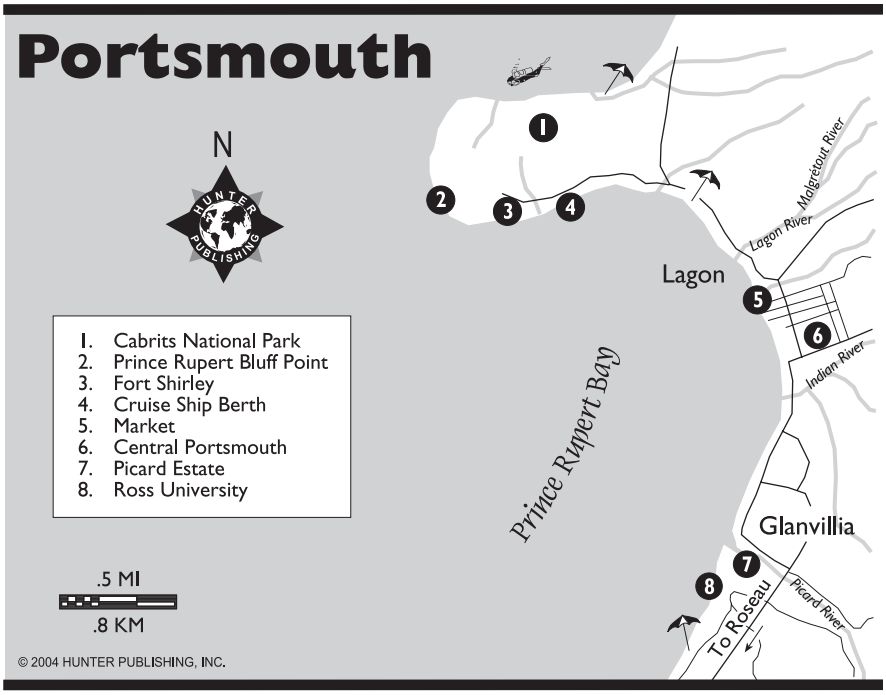
Back along the coast, the road passes a series of small villages that spread up from the shore into the hills. At the **Macoucherie Estate**, south of Salisbury, stop to see sugarcane being crushed by an old-fashioned water wheel, one of the last in the West Indies. There are no organized tours, but visitors are welcome free of charge on weekdays from 7am to 3pm, ☎ 767-449-6215 or 767-449-6409. Juice from the sugarcane is used to make the popular **Macoucherie Rum**.

North of the small town of Dublanc, you can turn inland to reach the **Syndicate Estate** where a trail leads up to the summit of **Morne Diablotin**, Dominica's highest mountain (4,767 feet). Turn inland toward the peak, which is located in the **Northern Forest Reserve**. The mountain is named for devilishly ugly birds with a wicked call who are known as *diablotin* by islanders. The devil-bird's proper name is the **black-capped petrel**, a shorebird that prefers mountain hideouts for nesting. They were once common on the slopes of Morne Diablotin, but over the years they've been hunted to the point of extinction, and have not been seen in the area recently.

Today, the mountain's rainforest is home to Sisserou and Jaco parrots, and you may spot them if you visit **Parrot Lookout** at sunrise or sunset. It's possible to drive almost all the way to the observation point before the road ends at an elevation of about 1,700 feet and a well-tended trail continues up the mountain. From the parking area in the Syndicate Estate, it's an easy walk on the one-mile loop trail to the lookout across the Picard River valley.

If you plan to hike farther, consider hiring a guide to lead you on the 3,000-foot climb through five vegetation zones, including a cloud forest. The trail is clear, but steep, and only fit hikers should attempt to reach the summit. A knowledgeable guide will add valuable input about wildlife and plants along the way, and provide the best chance of spotting one of the rare parrots.

Back on the west coast road, drive north a short distance to **Point Ronde**. This is a favorite anchorage area for sailboats, and the rocky shoreline is an ideal hunting ground for shell collectors. North, around the curve of the bay, there's a mile-long stretch of sandy beach and some good snorkeling spots. One of the best is the coral bed growing near the pier at **Portsmouth Beach Hotel**, south of the **Picard River**.



North of the pier, before you enter Portsmouth, you will see independent guides set up along the road with homemade signs advertising boat rides up the shady **Indian River**. This is a highly recommended tour since it offers a close-up look at a fascinating ecological zone inhabited by various freshwater creatures and hundreds of birds. Most of the guides know the river well and can spot rare plants and wildlife hidden along the marsh. Be sure to choose a rowboat rather than a powerboat, since the noise of a motor will detract from the peacefulness of the river and scare the wildlife. Negotiate a price before you set out, and expect to pay about EC$25/US$10 per person.

Carib Indians once lived on the river banks and used it as a route to fishing grounds in the Caribbean ocean. When early European ships stopped on the island for fresh water or wood, crew members often rowed up "the river of the Indians" to trade with the Caribs and soon began marking their maps "Indian River." Today, visitors are intrigued by the intricate roots of the *bwa mang* trees that house scampering crabs, and awed by the beautiful orchids that grow wild among the ferns along the swampy banks.

Your guide will probably suggest a stop at the bar where the river narrows and becomes rocky, and most passengers buy their skipper a drink. If you're interested in exploring, ask about walking inland to a spot where migrating birds gather during the winter. It's not far, and you cross through some unspoiled countryside.

Portsmouth

Portsmouth sits in the curve of **Prince Rupert Bay**, named for 16th-century nobleman Prince Rupert of the Rhine. The bay is lovely with palms growing in golden sand along the shore, and twin volcanos towering above the northern tip in Cabrits National Park.

You'll see groups of young people strolling along the roads and ordering from roadside snack shacks in this area. They are medical students from nearby Ross University.

Because of its protected harbor, Portsmouth was important to early settlers and was intended as the island's capital until malaria and yellow fever broke out. When the epidemic forced government to set up in Roseau, Portsmouth became a seaport town catering to worldly-wise ship crews. Travel between the two main towns was difficult until well into the 20th century, when the west-coast road was carved out of the mountains. Today, visitors will notice a definite difference between the capital and the number-two town, and many may prefer the high-spirited, rough-around-the-edges style of the northern port.

Since Portsmouth is a popular anchorage for commercial and private vessels, it has everything a visitor needs, including a new cruise ship terminal with a visitors center, museum, and crafts shop. This facility is the only Caribbean port where passengers step directly into a national park. The town is less than a mile from the park, and visitors can stroll to the Bay Street public market or one of the local restaurants. The golden-sand beach in front of Purple Turtle Beach Club on the bay is ideal for sunning and swimming.

Cabrits National Park is the highlight of the northwest coast, and **Fort Shirley** is the highlight of the park. Plan to spend most of the day in this area exploring the grassy Cabrits promontory, its well-mapped stone ruins, and the two scenic bays that surround it on three sides. Bring water, sunblock, hiking boots or sturdy walking shoes, and a swimsuit. Throw in binoculars and snorkeling gear if you have them.

Cabrits is derived from words that mean goat in Spanish and other languages. Before refrigeration, sailors often left goats on the slopes above Prince Rupert Bay to graze, fatten, and be ready for the dinner table when they returned.

As you approach the Cabrits peninsula from the south, you see volcanic twin peaks covered in lush green vegetation rising above the bay and sur-

rounding terrain. It is an obvious point from which to protect the island, and the British began construction of a complex called Prince Rupert's Garrison in 1774.

*Slaves built **Prince Rupert's Garrison** from black volcanic rock cemented with mortar made from limestone found on offshore coral reefs. The red clay bricks seen in ovens and cisterns came from England.*

Over the years, both the French and English (depending on which nation was in control of the island) added to the buildings until the Cabrits held a fort (Fort Shirley), housing for 600 men, a hospital, seven gun batteries, and a cluster of storehouses. When the fortification was abandoned in 1854, the buildings fell into ruins, and the surrounding forest quickly engulfed the entire peninsula. In 1982, work began to clear vegetation away from the fort and restore some of the buildings.

Park in the lot near the cruise-ship terminal and walk past restrooms and shops to a path that leads up to Fort Shirley. There's no admission charge and buildings, including the small museum, generally are open daily, 10am to 5pm, but hours vary with the seasons and cruise-ship schedules. The entrance fee is EC$6 / US$2.50.

If a cruise ship is in port, there will be a lot of activity on the Cabrits, but at other times, you probably will have the massive complex to yourself. The national park includes both the 1,313-acre peninsula and a 1,053-acre underwater park off the north shore, so you'll have plenty of room to roam either way.

From the top of Cabrits, **Prince Rupert's Bluff** offers exceptional views: Guadeloupe and Les Saintes to the north across Douglas Bay; Portsmouth and the west coast to the south across Prince Rupert's Bay; and Morne Diablotin, Dominica's highest mountain, inland to the east.

As you walk paths linking the fort with outer buildings, large placards pose trivia questions, such as *When does a tree frog extend its throat?* The answer is given at the next stop: *During courtship and when defending its territory*. Once you've strolled the 200-year-old military compound, explore the grounds with its diverse wildlife and abundant vegetation. Then, if you have boots, hike about 20 minutes on an unpaved trail to Douglas Bay.

Douglas Bay, part of the protected national park, can also be reached by car. From Portsmouth, continue north on the coast road past the left turn

that leads to the parking lot at Cabrits National Park. White buoys off the rocky, palm-shaded beach at Douglas Bay mark an underwater snorkeling trail over coral reefs growing on volcanic boulders. Colorful fish hide in the coral and feed off sea grass growing on the ocean floor. It's a fabulous clear-water wonderland, and, unless a cruise ship is docked on the island, you may have the whole place to yourself.

The road continues north from Douglas Bay, hugging the coast and providing excellent views of Les Saintes Islands, until it ends at **Capucin**, on the northern end of the island. Diving and snorkeling are good at **Toucari Bay**, just north of Douglas, but the water at **Capucin Cape**, where several ships lay wrecked at the bottom of the ocean, is considered too rough.

■ East Coast: Pennville to Delices

Some of Dominica's best kept secrets are along the windward coast. This area of the island hasn't changed much since the earliest settlers arrived, and it is the least visited by tourists. You'll enjoy deserted beaches, travel-poster views from rugged cliffs, and untouched forest. It's perhaps the best place in the world for getting away from it all. For this very reason, escaped slaves once hid out in this region, and a community of Carib Indians now live on designated land midway up the coast.

Highlights

- Daredevil **drives** to secluded hamlets on the north cape
- Sandy **beaches** and pristine **dive sites** on the due-north coast
- **Carib Territory**
- **L'escalier Tête Chien**

North to Capucin

A cross-island road from Portsmouth to the east coast begins near the mouth of the Indian River on the Caribbean side, meanders through coconut plantations, and ends near Sandwich Bay on the Atlantic side. At the junction of this east/west road with the main east-coast road (which runs north/south), you can turn left (north) toward the village of Pennville and zigzag along the steep shoreline. It's a beautiful up-and-down ride to secluded villages perched daringly on cliffs overlooking isolated Atlantic bays.

The villages of **Vielle Case** and **Pennville** were established by French settlers from nearby islands in the 1700s, and the French influence is evident today. Guadeloupe's outer islands can be seen from the hilltops here,

French Créole is spoken among the villagers, and some residents cross the channel to work on the French islands during the day.

One of the most picturesque churches on the island sits at the foot of **Morne aux Diables** in the village of **Vielle Case**. Ask one of the friendly locals to help you locate the Catholic Church run by Father Maupetit. Its stone façade is very old-world, and its red roof and tower contrast dramatically with the deep green gardens that surround it. Father Maupetit has planted trees and plants from all over the world on the church grounds, resulting in a gorgeous botanical garden. Before you leave the area, take time to walk along the shore on **Autrou Bay** where fishermen wrestle with their boats in the crashing surf.

The road continues north and is paved to Pennville. There are a couple of interesting sites in that area, if you want to do a little exploring. Ask a resident for directions, or pay one of the children to guide you to **Cold Soufrière,** an odoriferous sulfur spring similar to the one near Roseau. It comes from a dormant volcano located a short distance by foot from the road. Just south of the village, **Pennville Falls** cascades from a fracture in a slab of black volcanic rock. The falls are about a 15-minute walk from the road, up a steep hill. You'll need a guide or good directions from one of the villagers to find it.

If you have a four-wheel-drive vehicle or want to hike, it's possible to continue past Pennville, around the tip of the island, to **Capucin Cape** on the northwest coast. The landscape and views are marvelous. Plans are being made to pave a road through the forest, but for now, this area offers excellent hiking. Allow about three hours to reach Capucin on foot.

South Along the Atlantic Coast

The east coast actually faces due north for a short distance between **Chuval Blanc Point** at Sandwich Bay (west of Hampstead) and **Crompton Point** (east of Calibishie). This curve in the shoreline allows the sandy beaches to be sheltered from winds by the mountains and from raging waves by reefs and rocky outcroppings. **Woodford Hills Bay**, **Hodges Beach**, **Pointe Baptiste**, **Hampstead Beach** and **Batibou Bay** line up east to west along the coast and are excellent spots for swimming and snorkeling. Stand on the red-rock cliffs of Pointe Baptiste for a look at Marie-Galante and Guadeloupe across the channel.

Most beaches along the northeast coast are reached by unpaved roads or paths. Be careful not to trespass on private property.

Just east of Chuval Blanc Point, you will come to an intersection with a bus shelter. Turn inland, drive through the village of Bense, then look for

a path on the south side of the road (about a half mile west of the village) that leads to **Chaudiere Falls**. You may want to take one of the local youths along to show you the way through the forest. Once you get there, the pool at the bottom of the falls is a great place for a swim.

Calibishie is one of the most beautiful villages on the east coast. A mile-long barrier reef shelters its lagoon, residents take pride in tending their colorful flower gardens, and you can enjoy a drink at a seaside bar. Watch along the main street for local artists displaying their artwork.

The two rocks jutting up from Calibishie Bay are now called *glass window* or *open door* by young islanders because they seem like an opening into the underworld. Old-timers still refer to the boulders as ***Porte d'Enfer*** because they once supported an arch that resembled Hell's Gate. On the night of October 26, 1956, the top of the natural arch collapsed and fell into the sea. Nevertheless, visitors still stop to photograph this captivating spot.

The **red rocks** overlooking **Pointe Baptiste Beach** are extraordinary. Climb up the natural clay sculptures for magnificent views of the coast and Atlantic surf. The sandy beach below is ideal for picnicking, and the water is calm enough for snorkeling.

East of Calibishie, the road turns southward and there's a striking change in the scenery. The road runs inland for a while, then emerges at dazzling **Londonderry Bay** where palm trees grow out of rocky cliffs that drop down to gleaming black sand beaches on the rolling Atlantic. Melville Hall, the island's main airport, and the town of **Marigot** are nearby.

This area of the island was built up in the late 1800s when an English-owned firm took over rundown plantations and began producing cocoa products. The new company was unable to hire enough local workers, so they brought in residents from other English-speaking islands. Today, descendants of these workers still live around Marigot and the nearby village of **Wesley**, so very little French or French Créole is spoken, the residents tend to be Methodist rather than Catholic, and English rather than French traditions are observed.

A few miles farther south, in **Carib Territory**, 3,500 descendants of pre-Colombian Caribs live on 3,700 acres along the Atlantic coast. In actuality, the eight Carib villages are not much different from any other small community on the island, and few of the residents, who call themselves *Kalinago*, resemble their bronze-skinned, straight-haired South American forefathers. However, there are a few traces of their original culture remaining, and the settlement is well worth a visit.

On the main coastal road, you'll find small craft shops that sell baskets woven from rainforest larouma reeds into intricate brown, black and white patterns handed down through many generations. Turn inland to the little hamlet of **Salybia** where the altar inside the A-shaped *mouina*

(Church of Sainte Marie) is a canoe. A traditional oval-shaped Carib meeting house, called a *carbet*, is nearby.

Caribs are, by tradition, expert boat builders, and still construct each canoe by hand from a single gommier tree. You can see one of the dugouts under a tree filled with rocks and water to expand the trunk. The Caribs seem to have an innate skill that allows them to sail these canoes long distances even in rough Atlantic waters.

The word canoe *comes from the Carib word* canoua*, which describes their traditional long dugout boat built from a single tree trunk to withstand ocean conditions.*

THE GLI-GLI PROJECT

In 1997, Carib artist Jacob Frederick achieved his dream of re-enacting the voyage that brought the first Carib settlers to Dominica from their homes in South America. His quest was called *The Gli-Gli Project*, after a small determined hawk that figures in Carib mythology, and his route was the reverse of the course followed by his ancestors more than a thousand years ago.

Along with Aragorn Dick-Read, an artist and sailor from the island of Tortola, and Etien Charles, a master canoe-builder, Frederick supervised the 20-man crew who built a 35-foot dugout from a gommier tree cut on Morne Lasouce under a full-moon on a December night in 1995. When the canoe was complete in May, 1997, a crew of nine Carib men and two Carib women rowed the *Gli-Gli* from Dominica through the southern Caribbean to northwest Guyana on the Atlantic coast of South America, an 800-mile trip.

The trip took two months, and the crew was exhausted by the time they reached distant relatives on the shore of the Orinoco River. After a break to recover their strength, the crew successfully rowed back to Dominica, arriving in August, 1997. Independent film-maker Eugene Jarecki captured the adventure in his documentary *Quest of the Carib Canoe*. Read details of the adventure online, www.avirtualdominica.com/gligli/index.html.

Below Salybia, at the mouth of the Crayfish River, a pretty waterfall cascades over large boulders into the sea. A mile south, **L'escalier Tête Chien** crawls up the hillside out of the ocean near Jenny Point in the village of Sineku. *Tête chien* means *dog's head* in French, and is the islanders' name for a boa constrictor because the snake's head resembles a dog's head. *L'escalier* means *the staircase* in French, so *l'escalier tête*

chien is the snake's staircase – and the name fits the geological formation quite well. Carib mythology involving the snake-patterned rocks has been altered into obscurity but probably involved a pilgrimage up the formation in order to gain special powers or blessings.

At **Castle Bruce,** magnificently dangerous **St. David Bay** (also called **Anse Quanery**) curves into the shoreline. Sit under one of the palms and watch Carib fishermen heading out to sea in the morning or riding the surf back in the afternoon. It looks effortless, but a strong current runs just offshore, and the water is not safe for swimmers or inexperienced sailors.

Driving south, you'll pass banana plantations, forested slopes, and tiny villages on breathtakingly beautiful coves – every one worthy of a stop and a photo. Eventually, at **Petite Soufrière,** the paved road ends, and you must retrace your route to the intersection where the northern fork of the cross-island Transinsular Road leads inland. Hikers can take a trail at the end of the coastal road that climbs into the hills between Petite Soufrière and Rosalie.

If you want to drive along the far southern end of the east coast, go back to where the Transinsular Road forks, east of the Pont Casse junction near the trail head to Emerald Pool. At this point, take the southern turn toward Rosalie, where the Rosalie River offers swimmers a chance to cool off in several freshwater pools. Between Rosalie and **Delices**, the road winds up and down near the coast with many opportunities for ocean views and seaside picnics.

■ Inland

Mountains & Forests

Dominica's finest treasures are hidden in the mountains that run north-to-south through the interior. As you drive along the coastal roads and visit seaside villages, allow plenty of time to travel inland to explore the best natural sites. Branches of the **Transinsular Road** and the **Roseau-Laudat Road** provide access to many of the attractions in **Morne Trois Pitons National Park** and the **Central Forest Reserve**. Other locations can be reached by interior roads that jut off the main coast road and cut through the mountain forests. You can reach many of the sites by car, but many more require a hike, and a few are demanding full-day excursions.

If you are staying on-island, avoid crowds by visiting the most popular sites on non-cruise-ship days. If you're part of the cruise-ship crowd, arrange a private tour to explore less-visited spots. Guides meet the ships as they dock, or you can request a guide in advance by contacting one of the land-tour companies listed under *Tour Operators*, page 69.

Highlights

- Twin waterfalls at **Trafalgar**
- An easy walk to **Emerald Pool**
- Watching for the one-eyed monster at **Freshwater Lake**
- Relaxing in the warm spring waters at **Titou Gorge**

There are some superb natural sites that can be reached easily from the Roseau-Laudat Highway, an extension of King George V Street in town. The highway forks a couple of time, and driving more or less straight-on leads to the village of **Laudat**. A right turn at the first fork will take you to **Wotten Waven**, and a right turn at the second fork ends at **Trafalgar Falls**.

If you don't have a car, check the bus schedule at Old Market Plaza for times and fares to various sites. It's possible to take a bus from the corner of King George V Street and Bath Road, near the police station and Botanical Gardens, to Trafalgar Falls. The ride takes about 20 minutes and costs around EC$6/US$2.50 round-trip.

By car, it's a quick five-mile drive through Bath Estate to the parking lot at Trafalgar Falls, one of the most visited spots on the island. You can stop at four-acre **D'Auchamps Gardens** along the way to brush up on botanical names and look out across the valley to the island's highest mountains in Morne Trois Pitons National Park. The gardens are open daily, 9am to 4pm, ☎ 767-448-3346, www.candoo.com/dauchamps/index.htm. The entrance fee is EC$5/US$2, and a guided tour costs EC$27/US$10, which includes the entrance fee.

Trafalgar Falls are twin, side-by-side chutes known affectionately by islanders as Father (Papa) and Mother (Mama). It's a scenic 15-minute hike from the parking lot to the wooden lookout platform and a natural pool where you can swim.

Papa, on the left, is taller and plunges down a 200-foot rock face. At his feet, hot sulfur springs form small whirlpools where you can soak. **Mama** is broad, cool, and gentle. There's a deep, decent-sized pool at her feet, where you may swim. A rocky ridge separates the two, and it can be a bit slippery getting down to the pools – especially Papa's. Guides usually hang out at the beginning of the trail, and if you intend to go farther than the viewing platform, it's a good idea to ask one to accompany you. They charge about EC$27/US$10 for up to four people, but negotiate a price before you agree to their services.

Wotten Waven is across the valley from the falls and you can hike between the two, but you'll need a good guide to show you the way. A better hiking choice is back toward Roseau. Head toward the city, then turn left almost 360° at the first fork in the road to head back up the hill to

Wotten Waven. A sign in the village points the way to a trail to bubbling sulfur springs that are thought to have therapeutic value.

The village of **Laudat**, four-and-a-half miles northeast of Roseau, offers access to most parts of **Morne Trois Pitons National Park,** a 17,000-acre protected natural area that was designated a **World Heritage Site** in December, 1997 (the first enlisted natural site in the eastern Caribbean). The name Morne Trois Pitons translates as "three-peak mountain," and the huge volcano on the park's northern edge appears to have three peaks when you look at it from anywhere along the west coast.

Laudat's elevation is around 2,000 feet. Morne Trois Pitons is almost 4,600 feet at its tallest peak.

You can reach **Freshwater Lake** by car (preferably 4WD) or on foot. A rocky two-and-a-half mile road goes from Laudat, along the south edge of Morne Macaque, almost to the lake. There's some folklore attached to this nine-acre dammed reservoir that involves a one-eyed monster living in a bottomless pool, which makes the lake that much more interesting. Less interesting, even to the point of spoiling its appeal, is the modern-day reality that the lake is a source for an incongruous hydroelectric plant near the village. There are some fine picnic spots around the lake, and if you make a short climb up a steep slope on the southeast shore, you'll be rewarded with a marvelous view of the Atlantic.

Several trails to other popular sites in the national park begin in or near Laudat, and it's possible to arrange for guides who live nearby and know the area well. Most hotels and guest houses will suggest guides, or you can contact the tourist office in Roseau (☎ 767-448-2045) or one of the tour operators listed at the beginning of the chapter, under *Touring The Island*.

Titou (Ti-Tou) Gorge, the outlet of Freshwater Lake, is reached by a short walk and a bit of wading, swimming, slipping, and sliding. The trail to **Boiling Lake** and the **Valley of Desolation** starts at the gorge, near the power plant in Laudat. You need a guide to reach the more distant sites, but you can do the walk to Titou on your own. When you get there, you'll find a deep pool fed by hot springs at the base of a canyon caused by lava cracking as it cooled. You won't be able to stand on the bottom of the deep pools, but if the water isn't rushing too strongly, you can swim up the gorge to a waterfall. Paddling up the gorge in an inflatable raft is fun, but stay out of the water if it looks churned up from a strong current.

■ The Transinsular Road

The **Emerald Pool** is on the far northern boundary of Morne Trois Pitons National Park and the southern edge of the Central Forest Reserve. It's one of the island's major attractions, and you don't want to go there on cruise-ship days. At other times, take a bus from Canefield destined for Castle Bruce, and get off at the parking area for the trail.

By car, head inland from either coast on the cross-island Transinsular Road to the trail head three miles east of Pont Casse and five miles west of Castle Bruce. Hikers can begin the climb up Morne Trois Pitons from there, and strollers can follow an easy path through lush, green foliage to the pool. Islanders who remember splashing in the pool before Hurricane David raged through say the water level used to be higher, but the pool still is deep enough for a swim.

Watch for slippery rocks going down into the water and up to the waterfall. Even the pathway can be slick in spots because it winds through the lower levels of the rainforest.

TOUR OPERATORS

Ras Tours, headed by Bobby Frederick, has a staff of friendly Dominican guides who lead half- and full-day hikes and nature walks; ☎ 767-448-0412 or 767-235-3412 (cell), www.avirtualdominica.com/cocoacottage/indexhtml.

Wacky Rollers has a variety of half- and full-day Jeep tours and a full-day hiking tour; ☎ 767-449-8276 or 767-500-5337, fax 786-513-7638, www.wackyrollers.com.

Dominica Tours offers walks and hikes for all fitness and energy levels, as well as birdwatching and whale-watching expeditions; ☎ 767-448-2638, fax 767-448-5680, www.anchoragehotel.dm/anchtours.htm.

Ken's Hinterland Adventure Tours runs land and sea tours to all the major attractions, snorkeling/diving sites, and whale-watching spots; ☎ 767-448-1660 or 767-448-3517, fax 767-448-8486, www.kenshinterlandtours.com.

Nature Island Destinations is run by Colin Lee, who knows the island from north to south and can arrange tours, transportation, and accommodations; ☎ 767-449-6233, fax 767-449-7100, www.natureisland.com.

Island Adventures

As the travel brochures proclaim, Dominica is for nature lovers and eco-travelers. You're going to spend your days in total awe of the abundant wilderness and raw beauty here. Hikers, divers, bird watchers, and plant enthusiasts won't have enough hours in the day. There are mountains to conquer, untouched sea life to observe, and rare species of birds and plants to discover. Pack your knapsack with a good pair of binoculars, sturdy hiking boots, and a supply of the island's own bottled water, then set out in any direction for the best adventures in the Caribbean.

Designated **Eco-Tourist Sites** have a user fee. You can buy a pass from most car rental agencies, tour operators, tourist offices, and the eco-tourist sites themselves. Cruise-ship passengers can get them onboard from the activities desk. A weekly pass runs US$10, daily passes are US$5, and per-site entrance fees are US$2. All national parks and protected reserves are designated eco-sites, and the fees are enforced at major attractions. While beaches and most trails have no fees, there is a charge to walk/hike paths leading to some of the eco-sites, such as Emerald Pool.

On & In the Water

Dominica is not known for terrific beaches, and you won't find wide stretches of sand dotted with umbrellas, lounge chairs, snack bars, and sports-equipment shacks. However, it's not true that the island has only rocks and black pebbles along the coast. There are a some fine sandy beaches and numerous secret coves where you can spread a blanket and swim or snorkel over beautiful coral reefs. Many of these spots are tucked behind trees or hills and don't have paved roads leading to them, which makes them all the more private. Others are just steps from the main coastal road.

Skinny-dipping is legally and culturally a no-no on Dominica, and you don't want to get caught doing it. However, if you find an isolated lagoon, who's going to know?

■ West Coast Beaches

Twenty-eight good snorkeling areas have been identified off the west coast, where the Caribbean Sea is clear and calm. Beaches south of Roseau aren't the best the island has to offer, but they are some of the most interesting.

About three miles outside the capital, just past the village of Pointe Michel, the road turns away from the coast. Park here and follow a path down to a rocky little beach at **Point Guignard**. A few feet offshore, you'll spot **Champagne Reef** surrounded by an effervescent fizz, which comes from hot springs escaping through an underwater volcano. You'll notice a warmer water temperature about the same time that you're engulfed in tiny bubbles.

At the far southern tip of the island, about 10 minutes by car from Point Guignard, the kick-back-and-chill villages of Soufrière and Scott's Head loll on beautiful **Soufrière Bay.** Walk out to the end of the isthmus where a narrow strip of sand offers little more than a place to leave your towel. The protected marine reserve just offshore is fabulous. Cradled in an ancient volcano, the bay is a favorite dive site because of its abundant coral and sea life. The water is calm enough for leisurely swimming, and deep underwater sights can be seen with a mask and snorkel.

Between Roseau and Portsmouth, the coastal road passes some decent swimming-and-snorkeling spots. At Canefield, there's a little beach where a river flows into **Pringles Bay**, south of the airport. You'll spot **Rodney's Rock** from the road a couple of miles farther north, just before the town of Tarou. The beach is not good here, but the close-in reef is known as a nursery for juvenile marine life. Divers are often in the area, but you can snorkel out and get a good view of the coral and fish from above.

Méro Beach is a favorite stop for Windjammer cruises, and Castaways Beach Hotel is located here. The hotel has a dock, sailboats, and a waterside bar where the rum punch is made from scratch. Dive Castaways runs scuba, fishing, and kayak trips from the beach, and if none of that interests you, you'll find this a pleasant spot for swimming and snorkeling.

Picard Beach, on Portsmouth's south side, is considered by many to be the best beach on the island. It's a two-mile stretch of palm-shaded grayish sand sloping gracefully into the warm, gentle Caribbean surf at the foot of the rainforest. Picard Beach Resort is located here, near the north end of rocky **Pointe Ronde**. Snorkeling is best around the jetty, and if you're patient, you may spot an octopus or sea horse.

Cabrits Dive Center leads scuba and snorkeling trips to sites in the marine reserve in **Douglas Bay,** but you also can snorkel the underwater trail on your own. The reef grows on top of submerged volcanic rock, and houses colorful fish, eels, and seahorses. If a cruise ship is docked at Cabrits, the park and ocean reserve will be crowded. On other days, you may have the whole shady beach to yourself.

■ Northern Beaches

Once you travel around the north end of the island, the beaches are more beautiful, but the water crashing in from the Atlantic is rough and often too dangerous for swimming. The views, however, are marvelous, and the golden sand is ideal for picnics. This side of the island is sparsely populated and quite rural, and you may want to consider renting a four-wheel-drive vehicle if you plan to tackle the rutted, mostly unpaved roads leading down to the coast.

The best beaches are around the village of **Calibishie**, where the coastline turns from due east to due north. **Batibou**, **Woodford Hill**, and **Pointe Baptiste** are all sheltered from the brunt of the Atlantic's force and the winds that blow strongly onshore. Photographers often set up their equipment to capture the red boulders at **Pointe Baptiste**, and the two offshore rocks in **Calibishie Bay** that once supported a stone arch and is known as *Porte d'Enfer*, or Hell's Gateway.

■ Rivers & Natural Pools

Rivers flow through the mountainous inner island forming waterfalls and clean natural pools. Most locals prefer to swim in these rivers and pools rather than in the ocean, and you'll want to give it a try, especially after a long hike. Don't swim in the ocean or rivers near Roseau, and avoid slow-moving rivers since parasitic *bilharzia* is always a possibility. Otherwise, the water on and around the island is wonderfully clean and pure.

The most popular streams for swimming are the **Picard River,** which comes from the hills above Portsmouth and empties into Prince Rupert Bay, and the **Machoucherie River**, which flows into the Caribbean between Méro Beach and the village of Salisbury. The **Layou** is the longest river on Dominica and a favorite with locals. In 1997, a landslide filled the stream with dirt causing the water to overflow its banks and flood the surrounding valley. After a few years of healing, the river is once again suitable for swimming.

Two of the finest natural pools on Dominica are at the bottom of **Trafalgar Falls**. One is a small spa-like basin filled with hot sulfur springs. The other is large enough for swimming. Getting to and into them is a slip-and-slide experience best attempted by the sure-footed. But, once you're in, you'll be reluctant to leave.

Other easy-access dipping pools are at Emerald Pool and Titou Gorge. As at Trafalgar, the **Emerald Pool** is at the foot of a waterfall. It's a short walk from the parking area through the rainforest to the pool, and, except on cruise-ship days, you're likely to have the place all to yourself.

Titou is a hot-water spa at the beginning of the arduous trail to Boiling Lake in the Valley of Desolation. Hikers often use Titou as a motivational reward, but you can forego the hike and go straight for the soak by walking a short distance up the trail that starts in the village of Laudat. A waterfall is farther up the gorge, and you can swim to it if the water isn't flowing too fast.

■ Diving & Snorkeling

Popular dive publications call Dominica unspoiled, unusual, and undiscovered – the best in the eastern Caribbean. Novices can have a great time diving almost anywhere, but experienced divers want surprises, and Dominica produces them in abundance. There are dramatic sites directly offshore where seahorses, frogfish, electric rays, sea snakes, and reef squid live among huge stands of yellow-tube sponges and golden-orange feathered crinoids.

Southern Dive Sites

At **Scotts Head/Soufrière Marine Reserve**, an ancient volcano is half submerged with its south and east rims above water forming the island's coastline along Soufrière Bay. The north and west rims are underwater, creating a magnificent crater with 1,000-foot sheer walls. The reserve runs almost three miles along the coast and protects a diverse underwater world filled with spectacular coral and rare sea creatures.

The most popular sites in this area include **Champagne** with its bubbly underwater vents that attract schools of squid, **Dangleben's Pinnacles** thickly covered in all types of sponges and corals that draw thousands of fish, and **l'Abym** (the wall) featuring a 1,500-foot straight-down cliff where frogfish and seahorses hang out.

Northern Dive Sites

Another marine conservation area under the protection of the national parks system is in **Douglas Bay** on the north side of the Cabrits peninsula. Here, huge barrel sponges, brilliantly colored coral, and friendly fish make this one of the top dive sites. Nearby, the secluded **Toucari Caves** are encrusted with black coral and purple tube sponges, and the long tunnels provide an excellent swim-through. A vast assortment of elusive creatures lives here virtually undisturbed.

Much of the sea around Dominica has not been thoroughly explored, and new dive sites are still being discovered. One of the most popular new locales is a group of submerged sulfur springs inside a volcanic crater off **Pointe Ronde** at the southern end of **Prince Rupert Bay**. The springs

produce bubbles similar to the ones at Champagne off the south coast and combine with spectacular coral reefs to create a magical dive site.

DIVE OPERATORS

If you want to visit Dominica's incredible underwater world, you must be a certified diver accompanied by a registered operator. If you're not certified, the operators listed below offerinstruction ranging from introductory discovery dives to full-certification courses. Expect to pay about EC$134/US$50 for a one-tank dive, EC$187/US$70 for a two-tank dive, EC$226/US$85 for an introduction lesson (including one dive), and around EC$935/US$350 for a multi-day certification course.

All of the following are full-service PADI dive centers authorized to conduct scuba diving tours off the shores of Dominica. If you are arriving by cruise ship and want to escape the crowds, contact one of these operators in advance to arrange a private or small-group trip.

Anchorage Dive Center is located at the Anchorage Hotel in Castle Comfort. They have a 40-foot diesel-powered boat that will accommodate 22 divers, and a 30-foot speedboat for groups of 12 or fewer (this boat is also used for whale watching and snorkel/sightseeing trips). Andrew Armour and his crew, including Reginald Philbert and Michael Henry, have many years experience as PADI instructors and know the dive sites well. ☎ 767-448-2638, fax 767-448-5680, www.anchoragehotel.dm/.

Castaways Dive has two 28-foot boats that each handle six divers. Divemaster Kurt Nose has explored the reefs for thousands of hours and his friendly staff is ready to show you the best sites. They're based at the Castaways Beach Hotel midway between Roseau and Portsmouth and take divers to all the dive sites off the leeward coast. ☎ 767-449-6245, fax 767-449-6246, www.castaways-dominica.com /diving.php.

Dive Dominica is one of the oldest dive shops on the island. They have three customized boats, including their new Dive Cat, and owner/diver Derek Perryman employs an easy-going group of PADI and NAUI trained instructors and dive-masters. Contact them at their base at Castle Comfort Lodge ☎ 767-448-2188 or 888-414-7626, fax 767-448-6088, www.castlecomfortdivelodge.com.

Nature Island Dive is run by three European couples who don't allow their popularity to lessen their commitment to personalized service for small groups. The dive shop sits directly on Soufrière Bay in the heart of the marine reserve. They have three boats, including a new customized 34-foot catamaran equipped with a rinse sink for photographers, that can reach 20 super dive sites in under 10 minutes. Even if you don't want to

sign up for a tour, they invite everyone to stop by for directions or information. The shop also rents dive and snorkel equipment, kayaks, and bicycles. ☎ 767-449-8181, fax 767-449-8182, www.natureislanddive.com.

East Carib Dive is on the beach at Salisbury on the central west coast near the popular Lauro Club Hotel. They run a multilingual operation headed up by Harald Zahn (Germany) Béatrice Contréra (France) and Loni Costello (US). Customized dive trips can be arranged for groups with as few as four divers, and they can handle up to 10 divers on their 200hp aluminum boat. ☎ 767-449-6575, fax 767-449-6575, www.eastcaribdive-.free.fr/ (click on the British flag for the English version).

Cabrits Dive Center, on Picard beach near Portsmouth and the Cabrits National Park, is a PADI 5 Star Dive Center. Master instructor Michael Salzer and his wife Michelle Springall own and operate the business, and specialize in dive trips to rarely explored sites off the north cape. Cabrits includes a complete retail dive shop and service center, including hydrostatic testing of tanks. In addition to morning, afternoon, and night dives, the center offers snorkel trips by boat, waterskiing, and ocean kayaking. Since Michael is a native of Germany, all services and PADI certification courses are available in German or English. ☎ 767-445-3010, fax 767-445-3011, www.cabritsdive.com.

Sunset Bay Club and Seaside Dive Center is an all-inclusive resort, located on Batalie Beach near the town of Salisbury. You don't have to stay at the resort to dive with the scuba center. They offer courses, dive packages, and single-dive excursions. ☎ 767-446-6522, fax 767-446-6523, www.sunsetbayclub.com.

Fort Young Hotel and Dive Center is near Roseau. Dive packages for guests include a two-tank dive every day, but non-guests can book dives separately through the reception desk, ☎ 767-448-5000 or 800- 766-6016 (US), fax 767-448-5006, www.fortyounghotel.com.

■ Whale & Dolphin Watching

You don't have to be an eco-tourist to enjoy watching whales and dolphins in the wild. It's simply a marvelous experience that you don't want to miss. Most of these sea creatures are seen only in specific areas at certain times of the year, so deciding to take a whale/dolphin watching trip is not something you do anytime or anywhere the idea strikes you. That's why visitors to Dominica have such an uncommon opportunity.

Deep water near Dominica's sheltered west coast is an ideal breeding and calving ground for sperm whales, a species rarely seen in other parts of the world. Experts think eight to 12 of the huge mammals live in the area year-round, and seven types of whales and 11 types of dolphins have been seen within five miles of the island at various times of the year. You have

an excellent chance of spotting the creatures at any time, but they appear in greater numbers from November to March.

WHALES & DOLPHINS

Whales and dolphins are part of a group of marine mammals called **cetaceans**. There are around 77 different species of cetaceans.

Whales and dolphins have high intelligence.

There are two groups of whales – **baleen** and **toothed**.

Sperm whales are in the group called toothed whales. The sperm whale has about 20 large teeth in its lower jaw and few or no teeth in its upper jaw. A sperm whale's head is about 35% of its total body length.

A large male whale can remain underwater for 60 to 90 minutes.

Whales eat squid, octopus, and various fish.

Dolphins are smaller and more sociable than whales.

Female dolphins give live birth to one baby at a time. The baby, called a **calf**, emerges tail first, suckles from its mother for up to two years, and stays with its mother for up to six years.

Dolphins and whales live in groups called **pods**, and female dolphins tend to stay with one pod for life, but often interact with dolphins from other pods.

Dolphins slap their tails on the water to show annoyance and use their pectoral flippers to touch friends.

Air leaving a dolphin's blowhole may reach a speed of over 100 mph.

Since a dolphin will drown if it doesn't voluntarily breathe, it takes only short naps so that it can raise itself to the surface for air at frequent intervals.

If a sick or injured dolphin is in danger of drowning, other dolphins will come to its aid and hold it above water so it can breathe.

Experts think each dolphin has its own unique whistle that identifies it to other dolphins.

Since Dominica has gained an international reputation as a reliable place to study interactions among whales, some dive operators have outfitted their boats with sound equipment to help pinpoint the creatures' locations. Their whale/dolphin tours go out for three or four hours in the after-

noon and include a briefing on what to look and listen for once you're on the water. Rates, including onboard drinks, are about EC$/120/US$45.

WHALE WATCHING TOUR OPERATORS

Dominica Tours, ☎ 767-448-2638, fax 767-448-5680, www.anchoragehotel.dm/anchtours.htm.

Nature Island Destinations, ☎ 767-449-6233, fax 767-449-7100, www.natureisland.com.

Ken's Hinterland Adventure Tours, ☎ 767-448-1660 or 767-448-3517, fax 767-448-8486, www.kenshinterlandtours.com.

Fort Young Hotel and Dive Center, ☎ 767-448-5000, 800-766-6016 (US), fax 767-448-5006, www.fortyounghotel.com.

Dive Dominica, ☎ 767-448-2188 or 888-414-7626, fax 767-448-6088, www.castlecomfortdivelodge.com.

Cabrits Dive, ☎ 767-445-3010, fax 767-445-3011, www.cabritsdive.com.

Nature Island Dive, ☎ 767-449-8181, fax 767-449-8182, www.natureislanddive.com.

(For more information about the dive centers, see the listings under *Dive Operators*, pages 74-75.)

■ Kayaking

Ocean and river kayaking are becoming more popular in the Caribbean, and Dominica offers ideal conditions. Some dive operators rent kayaks and scuba equipment to certified divers who want to paddle out to a nearby dive site. If you're not certified, you can still rent a kayak and snorkeling equipment to explore the shoreline and seek out isolated coves for snorkeling and swimming.

The area around Soufrière and Scotts Head has shallow reefs near the shore. You can rent a kayak from **Nature Island Dive**, ☎ 767-449-8181, fax 767-449-8182, www.natureislanddive.com. On the northwest coast, rent from **Cabrits Dive**, ☎ 767-445-3010, fax 767-445-3011, www.cabritsdive.com for trips around the coast of Cabrits National Park or out to Douglas Bay.

■ Fishing & Sightseeing Cruises

Diving, snorkeling, and kayaking are the main watersports, but your hotel or the tourist office can give you information on other

adventures on water. Some of the dive centers schedule regular sightseeing cruises and fishing expeditions or will arrange for a private charter. Since there are no large marinas on the island, most multi-day sailing charters originate on nearby islands.

Close-in virgin fishing grounds hold blue marlin, dorado, yellowfin tuna, and a variety of other species. There are plenty of fish tales floating around the island, but it's a verified fact that a blue marlin weighing more than 700 pounds was hooked near the southern shore in 1997 by island fishermen. If you want to try to break this record, expect a private full-day fishing/sightseeing trip to run about EC$1,600/US$600, and a half-day outing to cost around EC$1,068/US$400.

Fun Sun offers sports fishing in a 34-foot boat, featuring a fully equipped galley, air conditioning, a freshwater shower, and a stereo system. The trophy-winning crew promises plenty of tall tales to entertain you while you fish for blue marlin, sailfish, tuna, dorado, wahoo, and barracuda. ☎ 767-448-6371, www.avirtualdominica.com/funsun/fish.htm.

Game Fishing Dominica is based at the Castaways Beach Hotel and offers individual and group charters. The crew will custom design a full-day or half-day of fishing and video the big catch when you reel it in. ☎ 767-449-6638, www.tod.dm.

In addition to the outfitters listed above, the following dive centers also arrange fishing trips and sightseeing cruises: **Anchorage Dive Center**, ☎ 767-448-2638; **Fort Young Hotel and Dive Center**, ☎ 767-448-5000; **Dive Dominica**, ☎ 767-448-2188; **Cabrits Dive**, ☎ 767-445-3010, and **Nature Island Dive**, ☎ 767-449-8181.

(For more information about the dive centers, see the listings under *Dive Operators* on pages 74-75.)

On Foot

■ Hiking

Hiking is an exhilarating adventure in Dominica's vast mountains and dense rainforests; an excellent opportunity to get close to unspoiled nature. Since many of the island's most amazing sites can only be reached by foot on demanding trails, you often will have this grand wilderness all to yourself.

National Parks

Dominica's **Morne Trois Pitons National Park** was registered as a World Heritage Site in December 1997. The park, which was established in 1975, covers about 17,000 acres and contains some of the Caribbean's

best examples of a rainforest (a tropical evergreen area that receives at least 100 inches of rain per year), montane forest (dense vegetation and trees above 2,000 feet on a mountain), and elfin woodlands (stunted growth above 3,000 feet found on mountain peaks with high winds and shallow soil).

The park was the first natural region in the eastern Caribbean to be listed as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It joined a list of other outstanding heritage locales in the Caribbean, including three sites in Cuba (Old City Havana, Trinidad and the Valley of the Ingenious, and San Pedro de la Roca Castle); the Colonial City of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic; the Citadelle sans Souci and Ramiers in Haiti; Willemstad, Inner City and Harbour in Curaçao; and La Fortaleza and the Historical Site of San Juan in Puerto Rico.

Morne Trois Pitons means "the mountain of three peaks" and refers to a relatively young (in geological terms) pile of volcanic rubble with three spike-like pinnacles that reach 4,672 feet within five miles of the ocean. The park that bears its name is not large compared to other sites around the world, but it encompasses a vast area of the island.

Morne Trois Pitons is a dormant volcano, but there is volatile activity within the park. The Valley of Desolation has more than 50 fumaroles and hot springs, which confirms that high temperatures exist just beneath the ground. Sulfurous gases from these steamy spots cause the valley to be barren and moon-like – a striking contrast to the lush vegetation in the rest of the park.

The rainforest has the tallest trees with the fullest growth. They block most of the sun from reaching the forest floor, and their massive trunks are covered in anthurium and bromeliads (plants that include the familiar Spanish moss). Most of the plants that grow on the ground are ferns.

Higher, in the montane forest, the vegetation consists of smaller trees with aerial roots that are covered in moss, lichens, and orchids. Sunlight gets through these trees more easily, and the ground beneath them is covered in grasses and ferns. Far up in the elfin woodland, the plants are matted and stunted due to the constant wind, rain, and cloud cover.

In addition to **Morne Trois Pitons National Park**, the island has several other preserved areas, including the **Northern Forest Reserve**, **Cabrits National Park**, and the **Central Forest Reserve.** Many of these protected areas are still uncharted because of their tangled profusion of vegetation, but trails lead to enough outstanding sites to keep vacationers busy for weeks.

You'll need a guide for most trails, but you can hike the coastal paths on your own. Pick up a good map and hiking brochures at the Forestry Division Office in the Botanical Gardens on King George V Street in Roseau.

The office is open daily from 8:40am to 4:30pm, ☎ 767-448-2401, fax 767-448-7999.

Boiling Lake & the Valley of Desolation

This is the "big daddy" of all hikes. It is arduous, excruciating, wet, exhausting, muddy, eternal – and one of the best things you can do in all the Caribbean. Start early, because it will take all day to make the round-trip, and you don't want to get stuck trudging the last mile in the dark.

You must take a guide. Any of the land-tour operators listed on page 69 can help you plan your hike, or you can make your own arrangements with one of the local guides who live in the village of **Laudat**, where the trail begins. Ask for recommendations at **Papillote Wilderness Retreat** (☎ 767-448-2287). The going rate for freelance guides is about EC$160/US$60 for a group of up to four, and they work hard for their day's pay.

You begin on a narrow trail out of Laudat, and, after you climb over some boulders at the trailhead, the first hour or so goes fairly easily. Then you descend to **Breakfast River**, and the real work begins. It's straight up slippery, misty, 3,000-foot **Morne Nicholls**. A long, hard trek, but worth it. At the top you're rewarded with a glimpse of steam coming off Boiling Lake. The top of Morne Nicholls gets very strong winds. Be sure to have a jacket in your backpack.

The descent from the summit is as hard as the ascent. Steep. Tricky. Slow. Muddy. Then, you come out into the floor of the Valley of Desolation. Whoever named this place did a fitting job. The entire valley bubbles and spits and hisses and stinks. The only better name would be Valley of Isolation. As you look around at the barren, simmering ground, you realize how far you are from civilization – and you wonder if anyone really knows for sure that the obviously agitated earth isn't going to erupt while you're standing there.

There's little time for anxiety or rest, because Boiling Lake, the prize you came to capture, is still a half-hour away. When you finally get there, you will be struck dumb – both speechless and senseless. For one thing, the lake is not all that big, and since you've been told it is the world's second-largest boiling lake (the largest is in New Zealand), you expect big. Actually, it's 270 feet across, and that, it turns out, is quite impressive for a flooded fumarole, which is just a hole in a volcanic area.

Despite the surprisingly small size, the lake is awesome. The most vivid imagination couldn't create a more bizarre sight, sound, and smell. An altogether inadequate analogy is a huge, growling cauldron of bubbling grayish milk giving off fumes that smell of rotten eggs.

Guides say the hike going out is no harder than the hike coming in, but it seems so because of fatigue. Well, fatigue and mud. But, when it's all over,

you can relax in the hot springs of **Titou Gorge** with an islandmade award-winning **Kubuli** beer. You'll swear then that, although you're glad you did it once, you'll never do it again.

Wait a few days. When the soreness wears off, reconsider. Chances are you'll be planning a return visit just to see how the valley has changed.

Guides make this hike two or three times every week. Remember that when you feel the urge to whine.

Middleham Falls

Three paths through Morne Trois Pitons National Park lead to Middleham Falls, which cascade 300 feet into a pool in the heart of the rainforest. None of the trails is particularly long or difficult, but the best one begins in the village of Cochrane, inland from Canefield on the west coast.

You start off crossing some streams that can be a problem after a heavy rain. Along the way, you pass **Tou Santi** or **Stinking Hole**, which is indeed a malodorous aperture. Seems the hole is actually a deep crack in the ground where thousands of bats have set up rather unsanitary living quarters. To add to the problem, the crevice emits sulfurous fumes from underground, so the two aromas combine to create olfactory hell.

Once you get past this, bear right where the trail forks to get to the top of magnificent Middleham Falls. If you want to get to the pool, you must climb down a steep slope. The round-trip takes about three hours.

Freshwater Lake & Boeri Lake

These lakes in the Morne Trois Pitons National Park are two of Dominica's finest. Freshwater Lake is the largest reservoir on the island, and it's possible to drive there, preferably in a four-wheel-drive vehicle because of the rugged stone road. On foot, the trip is an easy one-hour, two-mile hike from the village of Laudat.

Freshwater Lake is set in the mountains at an altitude of 2,800 feet, so the air is cool and clean. From there, Boeri Lake is about 1¾ miles to the northeast. Along the way you pass through beautiful forest with hot mineral springs and cool running streams. Boeri Lake is approximately 117 feet deep and covers four acres.

Take some time to enjoy the plants and trees that grow near the lake before you head back to the village. There are excellent views of Morne Trois Pitons to the northwest and the Atlantic coast to the east. The round-trip hike from Freshwater Lake takes less than two hours. If you hike all the way from Laudat, allow about four hours.

During dry spells, more of the rocky shoreline is exposed and huge boulders above the waterline create a danger for visitors. Don't climb on the rocks. They are extremely slippery, and gaping spaces between them may cause you to fall.

Syndicate Trail & Parrot Lookout

This easy nature-trail hike will take you to a superb panoramic viewpoint where you may spot a rare and elusive parrot darting through the treetops. Then you have the option of continuing on to the top of Morne Diablotin, Dominica's highest peak at 4,747 feet.

You can manage the nature trail on your own, but you'll need a guide for the seven-hour round-trip up the mountain. A naturalist-guide will have the best chance of spotting and pointing out parrots in the forest. Go with one of the experienced tour operators listed below, or ask for recommendations from the Forestry Division Office in the Botanical Gardens on King George V Street in Roseau, ☎ 767-448-2401.

PARROTS

Dominicans call their national bird a **Sisserou parrot**, but it is known internationally as the *Amazona imperialis* or imperial parrot. This royal-looking bird is 18" to 20" long, weighs about two pounds, and has a 30" wingspan as an adult. Its back is mostly deep green, the wings have a red streak at the tips, and its head is a dark, green-toned blue. You can see it on the island's flag, in the aviary at the Botanical Gardens in Roseau, and ever-so-rarely in the island's upper rainforest. But you won't see it in the wild anywhere else on earth; Dominica is the only place worldwide where this magnificent parrot can be found.

Another indigenous and endangered parrot that lives only on Dominica is the *Amazona arausiaca* or Jaco (St. Lucia's native parrot is the *Jacquot*). This bird is smaller, and a paler shade of green than the Sisserou. It has a distinctive red band around its neck, and lives at lower elevations in the rainforest.

Parrots are romantic birds who choose mates for life and – possibly as a result of their monogamy – live for about 70 years.

Find the trail off Syndicate Road, which turns inland at the village of **Dublanc** south of Portsmouth. Try to arrive just after sunup or around dusk for the best birdwatching opportunities. The nature trail is less than a mile long, but it winds through beautiful rainforest at an altitude of about 1,800 feet. At a point known as **Parrot Lookout** you will have a

magnificent view of the **Picard River Valley** and the **Northern Forest Reserve**, and a good chance of spotting parrots and other rarely seen birds.

From here, you and your guide can hike to the top of the mountain. The trail is well tended and passes through excellent forests and thick elfin woodland to a spectacular viewpoint at the summit. Ask your guide about getting to **Syndicate Falls**, an isolated cascade that requires some wading and boulder jumping.

Guided Hiking Tours

If you've done all the hikes above and still need more, tackle Morne Anglais, Morne Trois Pitons, or Jaco Flats. Take a local guide from the village near the trail head on all of these. They know the way, and it's good for island economy.

Morne Anglais stands 3,683 feet above the south end of the island. Pick up the trail in the village of **Giraudel**, which is inland from Castle Comfort south of Roseau. Allow an hour to walk through the orchidcovered montane forest and elfin woodland to the radio contraptions at the top of the mountain. Expect cloud and rain along the way.

Morne Trois Pitons' highest of three peaks rises to 4,550 feet, which makes it the second tallest mountain on the island. Don't try this hike unless you're in great shape and have superb balance. After passing through a relatively easy-to-maneuver forest area, you come to thick woodlands with steep boulders. The view from the top is great – if you survive the cuts from razor grass that grows along the trail. Ask for a guide in the village of **Pond Cassé** near the start of the trail.

Jaco Flats is an old hideout for escaped slaves (Maroons) in the Central Forest Reserve, and steps they built down the hillside are still here. Secure a guide in the village of **Belles** (ask for recommendations at the Paradise Bar) on the Transinsular Road. Allow about two hours round-trip. Wear a swimsuit under your hiking clothes and shoes that can get wet because part of the trail goes through the Layou River, and there are great swimming spots along the way.

Longtime visitors to Dominica say the best guides are found at trail heads or in nearby villages, and good friendships sometimes come out of these chance meetings. However, if you prefer to hire a guide or join a group hike with one of the established tour operators on the island, contact one of the following:

Nature Island Destinations, ☎ 767-449-6233, fax 767-449-7100, www.natureisland.com.

Ken's Hinterland Adventure Tours, ☎ 767-448-1660 or 767-4483517, fax 767-448-8486, www.kenshinterlandtours.com.

Ras Tours, ☎ 767-448-0412 or 767-235-3412 (cell), www.avirtualdominica.com/cocoacottage/indexhtml.

Wacky Rollers, ☎ 767-449-8276 or 767-500-5337, fax 786-513-7638, www.wackyrollers.com.

Dominica Tours, ☎ 767-448-2638, fax 767-448-5680, www.anchoragehotel.dm/anchtours.htm.

Forestry Division, ☎ 767-448-2401.

■ Tennis

Tennis isn't big on Dominica, but you'll find courts at **Reigate Hall**, ☎ 767-448-4031, www.avirtualdominica.com/reigate.htm, and **Castaways Beach Hotel** ☎ 767-449-6245, www.castawaysdominica.com. There's a user fee for non-guests, and you must supply your own equipment.

On Wheels

Steep mountains make most of Dominica a tough ride for all but the most experienced bicyclists. If you're in shape, there are some terrific trails along unused walking paths and carriage routes on old plantations and up into the hills. Full-day guided tours can be arranged for as few as four riders, or you can rent bikes by the hour or day and head off on your own. Even if you can't manage the hills, you may want to rent a bike to pedal along the flat coastal roads in the small villages.

Rental fees run about EC$30/US$11 per hour and EC$85/US$32 for a full day. Guided tours include equipment and average EC$227/US$85 per day. Some inns and guest cottages provide bikes for guests. Check with the following for suggestions.

BICYCLE RENTALS

Nature Island Destinations, ☎ 767-449-6233, fax 767-449-7100, www.natureisland.com.

Calibishie Lodges, ☎ 767-445-8537, www.calibishie-lodges.com/caribbean_villa_rental.asp.

Nature Island Dive, ☎ 767-449-8181, fax 767-449-8182, www.natureislanddive.com. Also offers guided bike tours.

On Horseback

Rugged terrain is no problem for horses. Climb aboard and tour the rainforest without gasping for air. Guided tours cost around EC$67/US$25 per person per hour, including helmets, rain gear, and refreshments.

Highride Nature Adventures, New Florida Estate, ☎ 767-448-6296 or 767-440-2117, www.avirtualdominica.com/highrideadventures/.

Orchid Hill Stables, Pond Case, ☎ 767-449-2218.

Sky-High

Dominica's newest tourist attraction is the **Rain Forest Aerial Tram**, operated by the same company that runs similar projects in the forests of Costa Rica. Eight-passenger gondolas climb from an elevation of 2,000 feet near Titou Gorge (a short drive inland from Roseau) to the top of a 3,500-foot mountain peak in Morne Trois Pitons National Park.

During the tour, the gondolas ascend through a narrow clearing in the treetops. A guide points out interesting features of the park and island as you glide upwards through a profusion of trees, vines, ferns, anthuriums, and bromeliads. You'll see variety of birds at eye level, and you'll view **Boiling Lake** and several waterfalls. The highlight of the trip is passing over the deep **Breakfast River Gorge** with its pedestrian suspension bridge. The tram makes a stop at a station near the bridge, and you may get out and walk across the gorge to another station for the return trip.

On the way down, your gondola will be high enough to see over the trees to the Caribbean Sea and catch glimpses of 4,600-foot **Morne Micotrin** and 3,683-foot **Morne Anglais**. Enjoy a cool drink on the shaded patio or pick up a souvenir at the gift shop after your tour.

The tram office is located at the corner of Old Street and King George V Street in Roseau, ☎ 767-448-8736, fax 767-448-8740, www.rainforestram.com/dominica/index.html.

Shopping

Serious shoppers will be disappointed by the stores and products on Dominica, but you can find wonderful locally made items to take home as gifts or souvenirs. Baskets and wooden goods made by Caribs are perhaps the most uniquely Dominican products to buy, but you can also find island clothing, crafts, music tapes and CD's by local

musicians, coconut-based soaps, rum, and specialty foods. Typical duty-free bargains are available in Roseau.

Art lovers will find outstanding pieces to add to their collections at competitive prices in several galleries on the island. This is the perfect opportunity to see and invest in works by Dominica's leading artists, including Pauline Marcelle, Arnold Toulon, Carla Armour, Darius David, Kelvin *Kelo* Royers, and Earl Darius Etienne.

Distinguished Dominican Artists

Pauline Marcelle was born on Dominica, educated in New York and Los Angeles, and currently lives in Vienna, Austria, where she recently earned a masters degree from the University for Applied Arts. Her original mixed-media works and digital prints are contemporary and ethereal. See examples online at www.paulinemarcelle.com, or contact Pauline Marcelle by phone or fax in Vienna, ☎ 0043-1-985-93-38-88, pmjohann@chello.at.

Darius David is affectionately known as the Old Man of the Dominican art scene. Born on the island in 1928, he began painting in 1950 and quickly gained a reputation as a talented self-taught artist. Most of his work is based on historical and biblical events, and his paintings can be seen in many international galleries and private collections, including the private collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of England. Success has not tainted the artist's innate island friendliness, and visitors are welcome to stop by his home studio at 8 Scotland Lane off Goodwill Road, north of the river in Roseau.

Earl Darius Etienne was born in Massacre on Dominica's west coast and trained at the Jamaica School of Art and the Edna Manley School of Visual Arts. Look for works using his trademark technique called *bouzaille* or *flambeau*, a method of applying forms to canvas using a carbon flame. His work is represented by the Iris Dangleben Gallery in the Caribana Shop at 31 Cork Street in Roseau, ☎ 767-448-7340. You may also visit his new Gallery #4 at 4 Hanover Street in Roseau, or his studio, The Art Asylum, located in Massacre. Etienne is an outspoken supporter of the arts on Dominica, and he participates in shows throughout the Caribbean, as well as in England, Switzerland, and the United States.

Lennox Honychurch is best known as an author and historian, but he is also an accomplished artist. In the past, he has painted murals at various sites around the island, including churches, the Calibishie marketplace, the Fort Shirley Museum, and the Cabrits Cruise Ship Berth. More recently, he has provided illustrations for his books on Dominica and the

Caribbean. He was instrumental in organizing and setting up the Dominica Museum in Roseau.

Kelo Royer has taught himself to create popular art using colors from nature in abstract designs that reflect his love for the land. See his work at his studio, 24 Virgin Lane, Roseau.

Arnold Toulon is the son of the late award-winning artist **Francis Anthony Toulon** and the brother of contemporary artist **Paul Toulon.** Paul's interest is in hyper-realism. Arnold prefers realism and surrealism with a heavy emphasis on Caribbean style. This artistic family has made a large contribution to Dominica's culture. See some of his work online at www.islandartandsoul.com/FeaturedArtistToulon.html.

It seems that nature inspires everyone to put Dominica's beauty on canvas, so you will find exhibits by many artists, some formally educated and others self-taught, who are not listed above. If you see something you like, buy it. Chances are, your talented but unknown artist will be the next big discovery. However, it doesn't really matter, since their works are an excellent way to bring a bit of Dominica home with you.

Top Shops & Galleries

Roseau has the largest choice of stores on the island, but handicrafts, rum, spices, and coffee can be bought at various locations around the island. Some say **Portsmouth** has lower prices, and perhaps this is true, but there are far fewer shops in the number-two town, so stick to Roseau if you're looking for specific items. If you're just browsing and hoping for a bargain, check out roadside vendors and stores in **Carib Territory**.

Real shoppers don't need to be told to ignore a store's curb appeal, and this is especially true on Dominica. Sometimes a weathered exterior hides a nicely laid-out shop with excellent merchandise. Most stores are open weekdays from 8am to 5pm, and Saturday from 9am to 2pm. In general, shops are closed on Sundays, but some may open when a cruise ship is in port or the island is hosting a festival.

THE BASICS

The best grocery store in Roseau is **Whitchurch Supermarket** on Old Street, ☎ 767-448-2181. **Brizee's Mart** is even larger and has a wider selection; it's about a five-minute drive outside of town on the road to Canefield, ☎ 767-448-2087. In the Portsmouth area, pick up basic cooking and picnic supplies at **G&A Enterprise**, known locally as **Tina's**, ☎ 767-445-4865.

Old Market Square is directly across from the cruise ship dock on Bay Street. This place is usually jumpin', especially on days when a ship is in port. Once a slave market, the cobblestone courtyard now houses vendors selling T-shirts, straw goods, batik-print clothing, and handcrafted jewelry. The booths are open weekdays, 8am to 5pm, and Saturday, 8am to 1pm.

Artwear Gallery, 54 King George V Street, Roseau, ☎ 767-448-3610. As the name implies, this third-floor shop specializes in hand-painted clothes using tie-dye and batik processes. Tracy Rabess is the artist. She trained at Parsons School of Design in New York, and signs her paintings *Antoinette*. You will see many of her nature-inspired designs on display in the gallery.

At **Cotton Batik House**, 8 King's Lane, Roseau, ☎ 767-448-3409, the designers use 100% pre-shrunk cotton to make original-art clothing for men, women, and children. You can also buy wall hangings and table linens decorated with unique batik designs. Owner Claudia Henderson is a talented singer who has performed off-Broadway. Now she spends her time creating distinctive wearable art that celebrates the beauty and culture of Dominica.

Frontline Bookstore, 78 Queen Mary Street, Roseau, ☎ 767-448-8664. Books, music, and stationery are available at this co-op shop that specializes in Afro-Caribbean culture. You can find all of Dominican writer Jean Rhys' books here.

Hot sauces, jams, gourmet coffees, bay rum body lotions and aftershaves are made on Dominica by the Parry W. Ballot Company. The brand name is **Bello***, and you can find the products in many stores on the island. For more information contact them in Castle Comfort,* ☎ *767-448-2860, fax 767-448-2053. Try some of the recipes offered online at www.bellobrand.com.*

Bernard Silkscreen, Woodstone Shopping Mall, Roseau, and also at Cork and Great George Streets, Roseau, ☎ 767-448-6783 or 767448-2006. Bernard Severin designs the silk-screened products here that include T-shirts, bumper stickers, and plaques.

Caribana, 31 Cork Street, Roseau, ☎ 767-448-7340. Carla Hutchinson, a graduate of Parsons School of Design in New York, is the owner of this shop, which houses the **Iris Dangleben Gallery,** named in memory of her grandmother. She designs and paints pottery, tableware, accessories and clothing, and offers crafts made by other Dominicans. In the art gallery, you'll find works by the island's leading contemporary artists. Don't leave without grabbing a cup of the super fresh-brewed coffee in the café.

Waterfront Boutiques at Fort Young Hotel, Victoria Street, Roseau, ☎ 767-448-7177. This is as fancy as Dominica gets, and you can find all sorts of duty-free luxury goods at shops such as **Whitchurch Duty Free**, **Mango Tango**, **Ganzee T-shirts**, and **Colombia Emeralds**. Best duty-free buys include perfumes, jewelry, and leather goods. Look for the hotel on the waterfront at the south end of the capital city.

Tropicrafts, Queen Mary Street at Turkey Lane, Roseau, ☎ 767-448-2747. The shop on Queen Mary street houses a workroom where you can watch local women weaving grass mats in the traditional Dominican style. As you watch, you'll understand why it takes about a month to weave a 10-foot mat. Other Tropicraft outlets are located at the Prevo Cinemall on the corner of Kennedy Avenue and Old Street in Roseau, and in Portsmouth on Bay Street. Among the popular souvenirs at the stores, you will find dolls dressed in native costumes, island rum, pottery, baskets, and T-shirts.

Land, 19 Castle Street, Roseau, ☎ 767-448-3394, www.archipelago.dm. Exquisite leather products are the highlight at this shop, operated by the Archipelago Trading Company, near the Fort Young Hotel. Belts, bags, shoes, wallets, and other items are handcrafted using a process learned from natives of a small village in the Columbian Andes.

Island Stuff, 25 Hanover Street, Roseau, ☎ 767-449-9969. Souvenirs, beachwear, and home accessories fill this new shop near the Old Market.

Dominica Essential Oils & Spices, 2 Jewel Street, Roseau, ☎ 767-448-2969. Island spices and spice-based products are excellent buys. This shop exports bay oil, the fresh-smelling base ingredient in popular bay rum aftershave and cologne. Stop in just to sniff the air, or pick up a few things to take home as gifts.

Old Mill Cultural Centre, West-Coast Road, Canefield, ☎ 767-449-1804, fax 767-449-0416. The gift shop here features paintings, baskets, and pottery made by island craftsmen. The wood-carving school spotlights work by masters **Carl Winston** and **Louis Desire** and their students. Winston is best known for elaborate relief carvings depicting Dominican nature and culture. Haitian artist Desire creates three-dimensional wood carvings.

Butterfly Boutique, Papillote Wilderness Retreat, Trafalgar Falls Road, about five miles north of Roseau, ☎ 767-448-2287, www.papillote.dm. You expect originality and quality in this nature setting, and Butterfly Boutique won't disappoint. There's a fine variety of art and crafts created by Dominican artists, including lovely mahogany sculptures by Louis Desire. Other choices include distinctive jewelry, magnificent quilts, and superb beauty products.

After Dark

Sunset is a big deal on Dominica, and you'll find residents and visitors positioning themselves late in the afternoon for the best view of the sun as it sinks into the Caribbean Sea. Waterfront bars and seaside restaurants advertise their sunset views more aggressively than their menus, and everyone who's been on the island more than a few days has a favorite spot from which to watch the daily phenomenon.

During the past few years, Dominica has gained a bit of fame for its music. You'll hear and feel the boom-boom beat of soca, calypso, and zouk pouring from terraces and open windows all over the island. Many of the hotels, restaurants, and bars feature theme nights with live music provided by local bands and singers. Ask at your hotel reception desk or at the tourist office about the most popular musicians and where you can hear them play.

Bars & Nightclubs

The Warehouse, in Checkhall north of Canefield Airport, is a dance club inside a converted sugar mill. It was open only on weekends during my last visit, but call to see if their schedule has been expanded. Music is coordinated by DJs from nearby islands, and there's always a crowd. Cover charge is EC$10/US$3.75, ☎ 767-449-1303 or 767-448-5451.

Cellar Bar downstairs at Sutton Place Hotel on Old Street in Roseau features jazz and karaoke a couple of nights per week. Call for information, ☎ 767-449-8700.

Smiley's Bar at **Wykie's la Tropical**, on Old Street in Roseau, often has a jing-ping band playing, and the Friday 5pm to 7pm happy hour is popular. This is a good place to meet friendly locals. ☎ 767448-8015.

Saaman Gardens on the west-coast road, three miles outside Roseau, near the Canefield Airport is open all day for meals, and features live music on Friday and Saturday nights. There's indoor and outdoor seating. ☎ 767-449-0900.

Symes Zee, on King George V Street in Roseau, is famous for its live jazz on Thursday nights. Get there early if you want to snag a prime seat, but the action really picks up after 10 pm. ☎ 767-448-2494.

Sundowner Café, on the west-coast road in Scotts Head, features jazz some evenings around sunset. Call for a schedule, ☎ 767-4487749.

Balas Bar at Fort Young Hotel on the south side of Roseau is the hottest new hang out in the capital. During the week, the hotel hosts a variety of

scheduled events, including a barbecue dinner on Mondays beginning at 6pm, and an extended happy hour on Fridays from 6pm to 11pm. Both include live music. Call the hotel for a list of weekly activities, ☎ 767-448-5000.

Spider's, on the main road, two miles south of Roseau**,** in the town of Loubiere, looks like a shack, but you can get beer for EC$3/US$1.12 and inexpensive snacks to go with it. The place opens about 9:30pm every day except Sunday, and they play great music.

Paladium Disco at **Portsmouth Beach Hotel** draws an international group (mostly students from Ross University) as well as young locals on weekends. Dancing starts around 8pm and goes until late. ☎ 767-445-5142.

Where To Stay

Officials hold a tight reign on hotel development on Dominica, and there are no big international resorts on the island. New guest houses and a few small inns have been built in recent years, and rainforest accommodations have become increasingly popular. The largest concentration of hotels is between the capital, Roseau, on the southwest coast, and Scotts Head, on the island's southern tip.

Nature Island Destinations inspects hotels, inns, and private guest houses on all parts of the island before featuring them on their informative web site. The agency also arranges transportation from the airport, car rental, sightseeing, and diving/hiking tours.

Owner Colin Lee is a British transplant with a wealth of information about his adopted island. He can direct you to spots he's discovered off the less-traveled paths, give you insider tips on guides and tour operators, and help you find the best Créole food on Dominica. Tell him what type of accommodations you prefer and what sorts of activities you enjoy, and he'll arrange your trip, at no additional cost to you. PO Box 1639, Roseau, ☎ 767-449-6233, fax 767-449-7100, www.natureisland.com.

See *Villas* on page 187 in the St. Lucia chapter for a list of questions to ask before you rent from a private owner or rental agency.

Cottages & Villas

Rainforest fans will find cottages and lodges in Roseau Valley, near the mountain villages of Trafalgar, Laudat, and Wotten Waven. A cluster of guest houses and inns has developed on the less populated northeast coast, near the village of Calibishie. Don't expect a lot of fancy amenities. Proprietors emphasize friendliness over

fluffy pillows and personal service over elaborate bathrooms. In most cases, your room will be modestly furnished and equipped with the basics.

We've listed a wide variety of choices in every price range on all parts of the island. A few private cottages are included, and you should take special care in reserving one of these, since cleanliness and comfort-level are subjective qualities on which you and your host may not agree.

Dominica hotels add a 5% government tax, and some add a 10% service charge. These fees may be included in the quoted rate, so be sure to ask.

Hotels

ACCOMMODATIONS PRICE SCALE
Indicates rates charged per night during high-season for a standard double room for two adults. All prices are given in US dollars, not including taxes. All-inclusive rates are indicated by "AI" in the listing.
$ . . . . . Under $75
$$. . . . . $76 to $100
$$$ . . . . . $101 to $175
$$$$ . . . . . Over $175

■ In & Around Roseau

FORT YOUNG HOTEL
Victoria Street, Roseau
☎ 767-448-5000, fax 767-448-5006
www.fortyounghotel.com
32 rooms, 18 junior suites, three one-bedroom suites
$$

Dominican history is set between the thick stone walls of this 18thcentury fort turned luxury hotel. The inner courtyard has the original flagstone floor, and heavy greenery gives the bar area a tropical feel. Recently, land below the original 32-room hotel has been developed to add 18 junior suites and three one-bedroom suites on the edge of the Caribbean.

The junior suites each have two queen-sized beds, a balcony, and a sitting area with a desk, computer-modem extensions, and a refrigerator. The

one-bedroom corner suites feature wraparound balconies, small kitchens, one-and-a-half bathrooms (including a whirlpool tub), and king-size beds in the separate bedroom.

All 32 rooms in the original wing of the hotel have been refurbished to turn this former tourist-class hotel into a sparkling beauty. All units have air conditioning, ceiling fans, balconies, color cable TVs, coffee makers, and a choice of bed sizes. A jetty allows dive trips and whale-watching excursions to leave from the hotel, and a new health/beauty spa provides a gym and massage services. Its seaside location within walking distance of downtown Roseau is a plus.

THE GARRAWAY HOTEL
1 Dame Eugenia Charles Boulevard, Roseau
☎ 767-449-8800, fax 767-449-8807
www.garrawayhotel.com
31 rooms, including 11 suites
$$

The Garraway family owns and runs this five-story, pale-green hotel across the street from Roseau's bay-front promenade and cruise-ship pier. There's an interior courtyard and rooftop terrace as well as a restaurant on the second floor, and a street-level duty-free shop and bar. The hotel was built in 1994 and all 31 rooms and suites meet international standards of comfort. Each unit is air conditioned and outfitted with ceiling fans, plush carpet, king-size beds, and cable TV.

SUTTON PLACE HOTEL
25 Old Street, Roseau
☎ 767-449-8700 or 767-448-4313; fax 448-3045
www.avirtualdominica.com/sutton.htm
Five rooms, three suites
Continental breakfast
$

Sutton Place is a stylish new inn with a past. Back in the 1800s, a Dominican built a home for his family in the heart of Roseau, on the spot where the Sutton now stands. The house was sold some years later to another Dominican family named Harris, who turned the structure into a guesthouse in the 1930s. Mother Harris ran the well-known inn until 1979 when Hurricane David tore across the island demolishing everything in its path and leveling Sutton Guesthouse.

Determined not to let David have the last word, the tenacious Harris family rebuilt on top of the original foundation using traditional island styles. Today, the bright and elegantly outfitted inn is popular with business and leisure travelers who want to be near Roseau's conveniences. Members of the Harris family oversee every detail, and the staff knows each guest by name.

The rooms are elegant, with fine furniture, fresh fabrics, and wonderful Caribbean art. Standard rooms have private balconies, air conditioning, ceiling fans, cable TV, and hair dryers. Three suites on the top floor have fully equipped kitchens, sitting areas, antique-style furniture, and polished hardwood floors. A light breakfast is served in the common lounge area each morning, and guests are encouraged to relax in the quiet courtyard garden.

WESLEEANN APARTEL
Ninth Street, Canefield
☎ 767-449-0419, fax 767-449-2473
12 apartments, one suite
$$$

This six-story apartment-hotel looks oddly out of place in the hills outside Roseau. Yet, once you get used to it, the rather utilitarian building seems most welcoming, and it has a load of extra amenities – such as balconies with panoramic views of the ocean. Long-term business travelers love the roomy homelike apartments. Families and groups traveling together get the privacy of their own rooms combined with the benefit of common sitting areas and money-saving kitchen facilities.

Wesleeann is only five minutes by car from Roseau, in a residential area near Canefield Airport and the cross-island Transinsular Road that leads inland to many of the island's best tourist attractions. Each of the one, two, and three bedroom units are air conditioned and features private balconies, ceiling fans, cable TVs, and modern kitchens with microwaves. In addition, the complex provides hoteltype amenities such as daily maid service, an exercise room, and a full-service tour desk.

HUMMINGBIRD INN
Roseau
☎ 767-449-1042, fax 767-449-1042
www.thehummingbirdinn.com
10 rooms
$$

Jeane James is an American-educated Dominican woman and hummingbird enthusiast who owns and operates this homey eco-inn perched on a cliff overlooking the sea between Roseau and Canefield. (Find it at the end of a steep driveway south of the gas station on the main coastal road.) Rock-A-Way Beach is a short walk down the hill, and the inland cross-island road is nearby.

The smallish rooms with private baths are not air conditioned, but hurricane shutters let in cooling breezes and there are ceiling fans. While the inn is island-style basic – tile floors, wooden ceilings, no TVs or phones – there are terrific tropical touches such as hammocks and a garden full of hummingbirds and iguanas. If you want to get a bit fancier, check into the

honeymoon suite that features a queen-size fourposter bed, private patio, and kitchenette.

PEPPER'S COTTAGE
21 Elliot Ave, Pottersville
☎ 767-440-4321 or 767-245-1234 (cell)
www.avirtualdominica.com/pepperscottage/index.html
One cottage
$$

This little cottage is perfect for an individual traveling alone or a couple that wants complete independence and privacy. It's located across the Roseau River from the main part of the capital city, on a road that parallels the Caribbean coast.

The cottage is compact, but well laid out, so that it feels open and spacious. There's a furnished patio with a small swimming pool and terrific views of the sun setting. Inside, the tiled living area includes a sofa bed, dining table, a small kitchen with a full-size refrigerator, and Internet access. The air conditioned bedroom is outfitted with a double bed and cable TV.

■ Around Castle Comfort

Several hotels line up along the coast just south of Roseau in an area called Castle Comfort on the main road to Soufrière and Scotts Head. They are popular with divers because of their dive shops and special dive/tour packages. For the most part, accommodations are basic but comfortable in a beachy sort of way. They make up for this lack of glamour by running excellent dive trips and island-wide tours using good equipment and experienced, well-trained staff.

ANCHORAGE HOTEL & DIVE CENTER
Castle Comfort
☎ 767-448-2638, fax 767448-5680
www.anchoragehotel.dm
32 rooms
$

The Armour family owns and operates this popular hotel favored by divers and boaters. The plain, ample rooms are air conditioned and have private baths, balconies, and cable TV. Boats can moor right outside, and there's a swimming pool, squash court, seaside restaurant, and tropical-style bar where international adventure fans trade stories.

An on-site dive center offers PADI courses and underwater excursions lead by knowledgeable guides. The staff will also arrange whale-watch cruises and island tours. Meal plans are available, and the resort offers a

variety of dive packages. On Thursday nights, the hotel throws a poolside barbeque buffet with live music and their famous rum punch.

CASTLE COMFORT LODGE
Castle Comfort
☎ 767-448-2188, fax 767-448-6088
www.castlecomfortdivelodge.com
15 rooms
$$$

Fans of this cozy upscale lodge come back repeatedly for the homey atmosphere and good dive-talk. Most of the guests are on dive-package vacations and enjoy sitting around the hot tub or dinner table going over their day's adventures with owners Derek and Ginette Perryman. The rooms are air conditioned and those located away from the water's edge have cable TV. Derek Perryman is an experienced, friendly diver who runs enjoys showing his underwater world to guests through his well-run dive center, Dive Dominica.

THE EVERGREEN HOTEL
Castle Comfort
☎ 767-448-3288, fax 767-448-6800
www.avirtualdominica.com/evergreen.htm
16 rooms
$$ (Full breakfast included)

Set on the coast with a seaside restaurant, this family-run hotel is the most posh of the Castle Comfort choices. It has an older stone building and a new annex, and rooms in both are air conditioned and comfortably spacious. The newer wing is fittingly decorated in bright colors and flowery prints, while the older rooms feature homey quilts and wall hangings. All rooms have phones and cable TVs, and some offer sea views from their private balconies. Guests enjoy a freshwater pool, marvelous sunsets over the ocean, and cool night breezes. Meals are excellently prepared with fresh island produce and include vegetarian choices.

REIGATE BY-THE-SEA
Castle Comfort
☎ 767-448-4031 or 767-448-4032, fax 767-448-4034
www.avirtualdominica.com/reigate.htm
21 rooms
$

Sitting on the coast, about a mile south of Roseau, this three-level hotel has 21 spacious air conditioned with fans, two beds, and cable TVs. All feature private balconies that overlook the pool and courtyard and offer a magnificent view of the Caribbean. Fresh-squeezed fruit juices are mixed with island rum at the poolside **Tibouko Bar.** A sister hotel, Reigate Mountain-Top on Kings Hill/Morne Bruce inland from Roseau, puts the

emphasis on gaming and fine dining, while this seaside hotel highlights partying and adult entertainment.

■ Mid-West Coast

The coastal road that runs between Canefield Airport and Portsmouth passes small villages and secluded coves that offer excellent snorkeling and shore diving. Most days are sunny along this stretch of coast, and you won't be far from the island's two main towns, the underwater reserve, and the national park.

CASTAWAYS BEACH HOTEL
Mero Beach near the village of St. Joseph
☎ 767-449-6245, fax 767-449-6246
www.castaways-dominica.com
26 rooms
$$$

If you want to be on the beach and conveniently located midway between the island's largest towns, this is a good choice. Castaways is family operated and offers the amenities of a full-service resort. Its set in a lush six-acre garden on a gray-sand beach with a dive shop, watersports center, boat dock, tennis court, and activities desk. The **Almond Tree Restaurant** and **Rhum Barrel Bar** are popular with locals and visitors, and the beach bar features a barbeque with live music on Sunday afternoons. Owner Bill Harris bought the property about 40 years ago and has spent many hours designing, planning, and overseeing every aspect of the hotel and grounds. The rooms are large and have balconies, ceiling fans (only six rooms are air conditioned), and cable TVs.

SUNSET BAY CLUB
Gueule Lion Point/Batalie Beach, north of Salisbury
☎ 767-446-6522; fax 446-6523
www.sunsetbayclub.com
12 rooms and one suite
$$$ (Full breakfast included)

Sunset is one of the newest hotels on the island and sits directly on the beach at the mouth of the Batalie river. It is run by the charming and friendly Dutrieux family from Belgium, who speak four languages, including English. Everything is ultra clean (even the pillows are washed between guests) and up-to-the-minute modern. All rooms have solar-heated water in the bathrooms (backed up by an automatic generator), ceiling fans, mosquito nets above the beds, and private terraces. The spacious honeymoon bungalow features a king-size bed. International and Créole cuisine is served in the restaurant, and an à la carte menu is available for anyone not on the all-inclusive plan. The hotel's amenities include a swimming pool, sauna, and massage services.

STONEDGE
Grand Savane, Salisbury
☎ 767-449-7998, http://stonedge.free.fr
Eight rooms
$

The charming owners of this new lodge are Belgian (Didier) and Dominican (Viviana), giving the place a unique mix of styles. Three guest rooms are located in the main house, which is on a hill overlooking the Caribbean. The double rooms overlook a large living area that is decorated in a rustic fashion with a vaulted, exposed timber ceiling. Five additional rooms are set in side-by-side, brightlypainted bungalows a short distance down the hill. All units have private baths and wall fans. Guests get acquainted while swimming in the pool and playing a round of golf on the crazy 18-hole mini course laid out on one side of the house. A balcony restaurant serves meals, and a TV in the lounge carries satellite channels. Pick up souvenirs and gifts in the boutique, which carries Caribbean art.

■ In & Around Portsmouth

Picard Beach Cottages and **Portsmouth Beach Hotel** are sister establishments under the same management; they are adjacent to each other on Dominica's longest sand beach, less than a mile south of Portsmouth.

PICARD BEACH COTTAGE RESORT
Prince Rupert Bay
☎ 767-445-5131, fax 767-445-5599
www.avirtualdominica.com/picard.htm
18 cottages
$$$$

You're paying for the beachfront location and lovely gardens at this rustic resort. For about double the price of most Dominican accommodations, you get a cottage with a living area and fully equipped kitchen, a separate bedroom, and a private bathroom. An additional bed in the living area is fine for children, but doesn't allow enough privacy for adults. The cottages are built on an old coconut plantation, so there are abundant palm trees to which the management has added a profusion of flowing plants. **La Flambeau Restaurant** serves international cuisine, and you're near a variety of other eateries in the Portsmouth area. You can arrange for all types of watersports and island tours through the resort, which offers scuba packages through Anchorage Dive Center.

PORTSMOUTH BEACH HOTEL
Prince Rupert Bay
☎ 767-445-5131, fax 767-445-5599
www.avirtualdominica.com/pbh.htm
170 rooms
$

Much of the older section of Portsmouth Beach Hotel has been rented out to students at Ross University for the past few years, but newly constructed rooms nearer the waterfront are available on a daily basis for bargain prices. All rooms are modest but clean with air conditioning or ceiling fans.

SISTER SEA LODGE
Picard Estate, Portsmouth
☎ 767-445-5211, fax 767-445-5211
www.avirtualdominica.com/sisters.htm
Six cottages
$

These three duplex bungalows are set on the beach near the mouth of the Picard River. Each unit has a living area, a bedroom with two queen-size beds, and a private bathroom with a hot-water shower. There's no air conditioning, TVs, radios, or Internet access, but you won't miss them. This is the place to get away from everything and relax. Owners Harta and Elka are friendly and intent on personal service. Fruit trees shade much of the property, and the security service prevents concern about lounging on the beach or sleeping with the screened windows open. A beachfront bar serves drinks and fresh grilled seafood.

■ Southwest Coast

This dramatic coast fronts the Soufrière/Scotts Head Marine Reserve, which protects some of Dominica's most popular dive sites. All watersports enthusiasts will enjoy staying in this area, near the island's southern tip.

GALLETTE'S SEASIDE COTTAGES
PO Box 2354, Soufrière
☎ 767-449-8181, fax 767-449-8182
www.natureislanddive.com/accomodation.html
Two apartments
$$$

The energetic couples who run Nature Island Dive (see page 74) own these cottages by the sea just outside Soufrière. The two units, one above the other, are self-contained, surprisingly elegant, and very spacious. The upper unit has one bedroom and a queen-size sofa bed in the living room.

The lower apartment has a bedroom and a queen-size sleeper sofa in an alcove off the living room. Both apartments are equipped with full kitchens and living/dining rooms. Perhaps the most attractive feature is the large veranda that faces west with a view of the setting sun. This is the perfect happy-hour spot after a day of diving.

HERCHE'S PLACE
Scotts Head
☎ 767-448-7749, fax 767-448-7709
10 rooms
$$

If you're looking for a great place at a good price, this is it. Set across the road from a pebble beach full of colorful fishing boats in the center of Scotts Head, Herche's is ideal for divers. The rooms are plain, but clean and comfortable with private baths, cable TVs, and a small refrigerator. Most of the rooms are air conditioned and all have ceiling fans. **Sundowner Café**, the on-site restaurant and bar, serves good food and drinks and is popular with folks on a budget.

■ Northeast Coast

The north-facing section of the Atlantic coast is protected from strong winds and turbulent surf, and has some of the island's best beaches and most beautiful scenery. Calibishie and Marigot are the main villages in the area, and each has a few shops and restaurants. The main airport, Melville Hall, is a short distance away by car.

CARIB TERRITORY GUEST HOUSE
Crayfish River near Salybia
☎ 767-445-7256, fax 767-445-7256
www.avirtualdominica.com/ctgh.htm
Eight rooms
$

Charles and Margaret Williams are the friendly owners of this guesthouse in the only Carib Indian reservation in the Caribbean. Rooms are basic and some share a bath, but you can get good home-cooked Créole meals if you let Margaret know in advance. From here, you can shop for handmade crafts, hike out-of-the-way trails, and hire Charles for an in-depth tour of his little piece of paradise. There's no better way to truly live the culture of Dominica.

POINTE BAPTISTE GUEST HOUSE
Pointe Baptiste/Calibishie
☎ 767-445-8495, fax 767-445-8495
www.avirtualdominica.com/pointeb.htm
One house, one cottage, with a total of 5 rooms
$ (based on five couples sharing the main house and cottage)

The main house on this 25-acre estate has four bedrooms and three baths, which comfortably accommodates up to eight guests. The small cottage has one sleeping area and is suitable for one couple. Both are charmingly old-island with a weathered look and homey furnishings. The main house has a fabulous view from the front veranda of Pointe Baptiste's famous red-rock cliffs overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Inside, there's a living room, library, dining area, and full kitchen. The cottage has twin beds in a combination living area/bedroom, a small kitchen, and a patio. Maid and cooking services can be arranged with the manager, Annick Giraud. The estate has an interesting history and many well-known people have been guests here, including England's Princess Margaret.

CALIBISHIE LODGES
Calibishie
☎ 767-445-8537, fax 767-445-8537, www.calibishie-lodges.com
Six units
$$$

Six studio apartments are located in three two-story bungalows on a hillside overlooking the Atlantic. Each unit has a bedroom, living area with TV, full kitchen, private bathroom, and a balcony or patio. There's no air conditioning, but the bungalows are cooled by ocean breezes and ceiling fans. Windows have screens, but each bed is draped with a mosquito net, just in case. The open-air restaurant serves a wide variety of dishes made with fresh seafood and islandgrown produce. Lovely gardens grow up the hillside and surround the swimming pool.

WIND BLOW ESTATE
Calibishie
☎ 767-332-3223, www.windblowestate.com
Three villas
$$

These modern villas set on the ruggedly gorgeous northeast coast offer up-to-date conveniences for a self-catered vacation. Each of the recently built one- and two-bedroom units are cooled by ceiling fans, and open onto a private veranda and sundeck. The living area is furnished with a futon sleeper-couch to accommodate additional guests, and there is a well-equipped kitchen. The two-bedroom unit has two bathrooms, which makes it ideal for two couples. You'll be tempted to simply sit and enjoy nature, but nearby hiking and watersports will call you to action. If you stay a week, the seventh night is free during both high and low season.

SEA CLIFF COTTAGES
Hodges Bay
☎ 767-445-8998, www.dominica-cottages.com
Three cottages, one house
$$

Each of these cottages is different in size and layout. The smallest is a 500-square-foot studio with a kitchen and living/sleeping area. During the summer you may rent the spacious one-bedroom house, which has high ceilings, a large dining area, fully equipped kitchen, and an oversized patio. For extra space during the winter season, book the two-bedroom cottage, which has a queen-size bed in one room and two twins in the other. All units are equipped with cable TV and a veranda facing the ocean. Mountain bikes are available free of charge for exploring the nearby beaches, rivers, and villages.

■ Southeast Coast

The eastern coast, south of Marigot, is sparsely populated and incredibly beautiful.

JUNGLE BAY RESORT & SPA
Delices
☎ 767-446-1789
www.junglebaydominica.com
50 cottages
$$$$ (AI)

Dominicans aren't enthusiastic about all-inclusive resorts with a long list of amenities, but this forest retreat may change their minds. It recently opened on 55 coastal acres at the eastern edge of the national park. Each of the ecologically friendly cottages is built of tropical wood and native stone and furnished with a four-poster bed. The private patios have hammocks positioned for optimal views of the surrounding forest. Paths lead through the lush gardens to a dining pavilion that serves healthy gourmet meals and a beach bar that features reggae music and tropical drinks. Other buildings nestled in the trees include a yoga studio, health spa, and gift shop. To maintain the restful peace of the resort, guests must be at least 12 years of age.

Mountain Lodges, Hotels, & Inns

SYMES-ZEE VILLA
Bayack near Laudat in the Roseau Valley
☎ 767-448-3337, fax 767-448-4476
15 rooms and suites
$

Jazz musician, Timothy Symes, who owns Symes Zee Eatery in Roseau, also owns this isolated hideout. He built it on family property about 15 years ago after returning from New York, where he lived long enough to learn the meaning of rat-race. For him, SymesZees Villa is the ideal remedy for stress-worn minds and bodies, and his staff is trained to provide peace and calm along with efficient service. The small hotel has magnificent views from its perch 3,010 feet above sea level near Middleham waterfalls. Rooms are simple, clean, and comfortable, and there's a restaurant/bar for those who don't want to summon the energy to drive 15 minutes into Roseau.

ROXY'S MOUNTAIN LODGE
Laudat
☎ 767-448-4845, fax 767-448-4845
www.avirtualdominica.com/eiroxys.htm
11 rooms
$

Roxy's was designed for guests who love wild nature. It sits 2,000 feet above sea level less than five miles from Roseau near trails into Morne Trois Pitons National Park. The simple double rooms have individual verandas and bathrooms for privacy, but the common areas encourage friendly gatherings. Experienced guides are available to take you to nearby sites such as the Valley of Desolation, Boiling Lake, and the summit of Morne Macaque. Afterwards, you can rejuvenate in the warm mineral springs and icy cold waters that converge at Titou Gorge, and enjoy delicious Créole food in the lodge's restaurant.

REIGATE MOUNTAIN-TOP HOTEL
Kings Hill/Morne Bruce, inland from Roseau
☎ 767-448-4031 or 767-448-4032, fax 767-448-4034
www.avirtualdominica.com/reigate.html
16 rooms, suites, and apartments
$

This quaint hotel sits snug against a mountainside above Roseau with a magnificent view of the city and western coast. Elegant touches accent this former manor house where air conditioned guest rooms have large tiled bathrooms with bidets and private balconies with panoramic views. Suites have refrigerators, wet bars, and Jacuzzi-style tubs. The two-bed-

room apartment is designed for three guests and has facilities for disabled guests, but it has no kitchen.

You'll enjoy the specially blended tropical drinks in **Penny Farthing Pub**, which is known for its friendly hospitality. In the restaurant, Dominican dishes are cooked up by excellent chefs who can turn out American and European cuisine as well. A swimming pool, tennis court, and sauna are on site, and the national park is nearby.

ITASSI COTTAGES
Morne Bruce, inland from Roseau
☎ 767-448-4313, fax 767-448-3045
www.avirtualdominica.com/itassi/home.htm
Three cottages
$

If you want to be near the capital but away from the crowds and noise, consider renting one of these cottages up the hill from Roseau in the residential neighborhood of Morne Bruce. The two-bedroom, two-bath chalet sleeps six; the one-bedroom, one-bath unit accommodates four; and the studio cottage is suitable for two.

Each old-island-style bungalow has a terrific panoramic view all the way to Scotts Head on the southern coast. You can cook meals in the fully equipped kitchens or take a quick drive into town for meals. Furnishings include ceiling fans, TVs, and telephones – for the price, you can't beat the amenities and space.

CHEZ OPHELIA
Roseau Valley
☎ 448-3438 or 448-3061; fax 448-3433
Five cottage apartments
$

These colorful cottages are on the Copt Hall Estate five minutes by car from the center of Roseau. Dominica's talented and vivacious First Lady of Song, Ophelia, oversees the operation of the teal-trimmed white bungalows while continuing to release new music – her latest CD is entitled *The Rhythm of the Times*. Each of the apartments has a double bed, a sleeper sofa in the living area, an equipped kitchen, and private veranda. Guests here have less than a 15-minute drive to the major inland attractions such as Trafalgar Falls, Wotten Waven, and swimming in the Roseau River.

ROSEAU VALLEY HOTEL
Copt Hall, Roseau Valley
☎ 767-449-8176, fax 767-449-8722
www.roseauvalleyhotel.com
11 rooms and apartments
$

You'll have new island-style accommodations at this sunny-yellow two-story inn with brightly painted balcony railings. The spacious rooms have queen or double beds, cable TV, and modern bathrooms. The one- and two-bedroom apartments are similarly equipped and include contemporary kitchen facilities. The **Waterhole Restaurant** serves excellent Créole-style meals, and guests may get breakfast and dinner daily for an additional charge. Car rentals and tours can be arranged through the front desk.

PAPILLOTE WILDERNESS RETREAT & NATURE SANCTUARY
Trafalgar Road, Roseau Valley
☎ 448-2287; fax 448-2285
www.papillote.dm
Eight rooms
$$

Papillote's owners, Anne and Cuthbert Jno. Baptiste, make it perfectly clear that it is not – nor does it aspire to be – the Dominican Hilton. What it is, however, is a wonderfully secluded sanctuary in the midst of perhaps the best botanical garden in the Caribbean. In the past few years, the retreat has been featured in countless international publications and praised for its ecological approach to tourism.

Since Papillote was blown to the ground along with most everything else on the island during Hurricane David in 1979, the inn is fairly new and constantly undergoing improvements. All the rooms are comfortably rustic and decorated with local arts and crafts. The Waterfall Cottage has two bedrooms, two baths, and a small kitchen – ideal for families or friends traveling together.

While the rooms are charming and quite adequate, the emphasis is on nature, and the great outdoors is intentionally more gorgeous than anything inside. When you ask for a tour of the property, it's the gardens and natural hot springs that are pointed out rather anything indoors. Recently, trails throughout the property have been upgraded, and a small structure has been converted into a birdwatcher's house.

ZANDOLI INN
Roche Casse/Stowe
☎ 767-446-3161, fax 767-46-3344
www.zandoli.com
Five rooms
$$$

Zandoli Inn is a nature lover's dream world perched 80 feet above Grand Bay on six secluded acres on the far southern coast. You'll need a car if you plan to tour the island from here, but chances are you'll never want to leave this little piece of garden paradise.

Linda Hyland and Tony Hall created the Mediterranean-style inn with a strong sense of ecological responsibility, so there's no air conditioning, telephones or TVs. You won't miss them. Each of the five spacious guest rooms has a balcony that lets in cool breezes, and there are mosquito nets and fans, if needed. You'll be entertained by the spectacular views from your patio instead of TV, and you'll shower in solar-powered hot water in your private bathroom.

Meals (additional charge) are served on the patio or indoor dining room, and there's a plunge pool with bar service. You can spend days hiking the trails in and around the inn, and it's possible to snorkel in sheltered water off the rocky coast. If you should decide to venture out, Linda and Tony will help you plan sightseeing tours and hiking or diving trips.

BEST CARIBBEAN HOTEL
Morne Daniel
☎ 767-449-3560, fax 767-449-0768
www.avirtualdominica.com/besthotel
10 rooms
$$

This is the newest full-service hotel on the island. The three-level modern hotel has spacious rooms with balconies, cable TVs, and small refrigerators. A restaurant and bar are located near the swimming pool and sun deck. Guests are welcomed with a tropical drink and given passes for free admission to the popular nightclub, **Scorpio Underground**. Ask about their economical hotel-and-car packages.

Camping

Overnight camping is not encouraged anywhere on the island and it is illegal to camp in the National Parks. However, some eco-inns located in the forest offer camp-like lodging and amenities. See *Cottages & Villas*, page 91.

Where To Eat

Dominica has some excellent cuisine and adventurous dining options, but don't expect the outstanding French dishes served by neighboring Martinique and Guadeloupe. Most of the meals are basic **Créole** made with just-picked produce flavored with tangy spices. Islanders use everything the land provides and sometimes put together unique dishes made from unwritten recipes handed down through many generations.

If you're daring, you can get large, inexpensive meals in small family-run cafés throughout the island. Some are well established and serve dependably wholesome fare. Those are listed below. Others open and close with the seasons or at the whim of the owner. Those you must come upon in your travels and sample for yourself.

Don't be afraid to try the small local cafés and snack shacks around the island since they often serve the most genuinely Dominican foods prepared with loving care from generations-old family recipes. In addition, you can pick up interesting stories and useful information from the cooks and servers – who just may be the same person.

Hotels and guest houses usually welcome outside diners, but you'll want to call ahead to be sure. In most cases, the chef will need a few hours' notice in order to prepare enough food for extra guests. During peak tourist season and special events, it's a good idea to make dinner reservations early in the day at both large restaurants and small cafés.

In general, restaurants are informal, and many serve meals on outdoor patios. During the day, islanders and tourists wear shorts and sandals everywhere, but swimsuits are out of place inside even the most casual cafés. At dinner, men usually wear slacks and shirts with collars. Women are most comfortable in slacks or sundresses.

Dominican Cuisine

Since Dominicans tend to cook without recipes, the same dish at different restaurants may taste surprisingly dissimilar. For instance, a dish called *provisions* may be made with any of several root vegetables, including yams, pumpkin, and dasheen. The cook then flavors the mashed vegetables with whatever spices are available.

Callaloo soup is a popular appetizer or light lunch. It's made from tender leaves found at the center of the dasheen plant (also known as taro), and tastes somewhat like spinach, but varies with the selection of spices used for flavoring. Richer versions of this soup are made with coconut milk, and crabmeat or dumplings are common additions.

Bananas and **plantains** are usually part of every meal. The ripe fruit is made into fritters or served flambéed, and green bananas and plantains are served boiled or fried. If you see *ton-ton* on the menu, it refers to a West African dish made from mashed plantains or **breadfruit**.

Dominicans make wonderful **drinks** from the juice of every fruit. The best are passion fruit, guava, gooseberry, cherry, and apricot. Some of the more unusual include soursop, pawpaw, seamoss, beet, and gingerbeer. Try them all. Most are said to have excellent health benefits.

Crab is usually the black land variety that Dominicans serve stuffed and spicy. ***Lambi*** is conch, a very popular seafood that shows up in one form or another on most menus. **Lobster** is a spiny creature caught among the coral reefs near shore, not the large-claw type that is popular in New England. ***Chatu*** is octopus, a surprisingly good choice when properly cooked. All of these seafood meals typically come with a delicious fiery condiment made from peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, and onions.

The ***roti*** is Dominica's fast-food favorite. Similar to tortilla-wraps or pita-bread sandwiches, these delicious treats are filled with spicy beef, chicken, fish, or vegetables. Another item that appears on most menus is "mountain chicken." While it tastes similar to chicken, it is actually frog. This large, leggy amphibian, known as ***crapaud*** (crah-PO), can only be caught during winter months because it is a protected species and, therefore, is considered a delicacy. Only the back legs are eaten, and they look and taste something like tiny, white-meat chicken legs.

If frog legs are a turn-off for you, you probably won't like **manicou** or **agouti**, either. A manicou, you may remember from the wildlife section, is a small opossum, and an agouti is a large rodent similar to a guinea pig. Both are served either stewed or smoked, which does a fine job of hiding their strong, gamey flavor.

Perhaps the safest choice, especially at smaller cafés, is freshly caught fish. The most popular varieties are ***dorado*** (also called dolphin – the fish, not the mammal), ***ton*** (tuna), ***zorfi*** (garfish), **bonito**, **grouper**, and **snapper**. You'll find them cooked all sorts of ways and served with various sauces. When paired with local vegetables, they make a dependably delicious meal for even picky eaters. See *Common Menu Items*, page 12, for more descriptions of island cuisine.

■ Dining Price Guide

The following scale is quoted in US dollars, but most menus list prices in Eastern Caribbean dollars (EC$2.67=US$1).

DINING PRICE SCALE
Based on a complete dinner for one person excluding drinks, taxes, and tips. Lunch prices will be lower.
$ . . . . . Under $10
$$ . . . . . $10 to $20
$$$. . . . . $21 to $30
$$$$. . . . . Over $30

■ Roseau

King George V Street runs from the waterfront through town to the Botanical Gardens and is lined with island-style buildings that house shops, grocery stores, and inexpensive to moderately priced cafés. If in doubt about where to eat, walk up this busy road and follow the crowds into one of the colorful eateries. You won't leave hungry or disappointed.

RAFFOUL'S FOOD COURT
King George V Street
☎ 767-448-4145
Monday through Thursday, 7am to 8:30pm
Friday and Saturday, 7am to 11:30am and 4 to 8pm
Fast food
$

This eatery is part bakery and serves outstanding breads (you won't be able to resist the cinnamon rolls). It also has a deli counter with rotisserie chicken, sandwiches, quiches, pizzas, and other quick meal choices.

CALLALOO
King George V Street
☎ 767-448-3386
Monday through Saturday, 7:30am to 10pm
Sunday, 3:30pm to 10pm
West Indian
$

As you would expect, they serve an exceptional *callaloo* soup that's hearty enough for a meal. In addition, there's West Indian lunch and dinner specials and homemade desserts. (The grilled lobster in limebutter sauce is outstanding.) If you're in town for the Saturday morning market, stop by for the popular weekend breakfast special.

PEARL'S
King George V Street
☎ 767-448-8707
Monday through Saturday, 7:30am to 10:30pm
Caribbean
$

You can order take-out for a picnic or eat inside this casual café. Dominican dishes are made from scratch with whatever happens to be fresh and accessible that day. In addition, there are burgers, chicken, and sandwiches.

CORNERHOUSE INFORMATION CAFE
King George V Street
☎ 767-449-9000
www.avirtualdominica.com/cornerhouse/home.htm
Monday, 8am to 3:30pm
Tuesday through Friday, 8am to 10pm
Saturday, 10am to 10pm
Sandwiches
$

Located on the second floor of a corner building, this cybercafé serves up sandwiches and such with Internet access. Place your order then sign on at a rate of EC$8/US$3 for a half-hour of browsing.

THE ORCHARD
King George V Street
☎ 767-448-3051
Monday through Friday, 8am to 10pm
Saturday, 8am to 4pm
Seafood and Créole
$

Sit in the shady courtyard to enjoy a burger or sandwiches during the day. Return in the evening for one of the local specialties, such as black pudding (a fiery blood sausage) and mystery-meat pies. If you're not in the mood to be daring, stick with the seafood choices offered on week nights.

SYMES-ZEE EATERY
King George V Street
☎ 767-448-3337
Monday through Saturday, 9am to midnight
West Indian
$

This is a fine place for traditional Dominican fare, but the real attraction is the Thursday night entertainment provided by top Jazz musicians. Owner Timothy Symes, who also owns Symes-Zees Villa in the mountains above Laudat (see page 103), is a former New York jazz player. He per-

forms at the Eatery on occasion, so call in advance for the schedule of entertainers.

COCORICO RESTAURANT, GOURMET GROCERY & WINE STORE (A.K.A TI' CAZ)
Bayfront at Kennedy Avenue
☎ 767-449-8686, fax 767-449-9774
www.cocorico-wine.com
French/Créole
Monday through Friday, 8:30am to 10pm
Saturday, 8:30am to 2pm
$$$

You'll find gourmet foods and wines at this combination shop and restaurant. Look for the striking blue roof and charming Créole-style house near the ferry terminal on the waterfront. The restaurant serves all day, beginning with cheese omelets for breakfast, progressing to croissant sandwiches midday, and ending with exotic French dishes in the evening. In the shop, you'll discover fresh baguettes, imported chocolates, pâté, French hams, fine cheeses, and a large selection of international wines. The friendly and the knowledgeable staff speaks Créole, English, French, and Spanish.

LA ROBE CREOLE
3 Victoria Street
☎ 767-448-2896
Monday through Saturday, noon to 10pm
Créole
$$$

Possibly the most popular restaurant in the capital city, La Robe Créole does all the basics right. The *callaloo* soup is rich with coconut milk, and the freshly caught fish is grilled with an excellent combination of spices. Waitresses wear colorful madras skirts and headdresses, waiters are decked out in white shirts with red cummerbunds and bow ties. They're friendly and cheerful, but can be inattentive on a busy night. No matter. The food and atmosphere make up for less than snappy service. The dining room is casual and relaxed with stone walls, wooden rafters and floors, madras tablecloths, and plenty of tropical plants. Save room for one of the outstanding desserts that are homemade every day. Call early for dinner reservations.

MOUSE HOLE SNACKETTE
3 Victoria Street
☎ 767-448-2896
Monday through Saturday, 8am to 9:30pm
Snacks
$

The clever name describes this take-out snack bar perfectly. It's a small hole-in-the-wall in the basement of La Robe Créole Restaurant that serves up wonderful, inexpensive munchies such as *rotis*, sandwiches, fruit juices, quick-breads, and salads. This is the ideal stop for picnic supplies, but you can also eat at a small indoor counter. Bring cash, because they don't accept credit cards.

GUIYAVE
15 Cork Street
☎ 767-448-2930
Monday through Saturday, 8am to 3:30pm
Créole
$

This 100-year-old site houses a downstairs patisserie and an upstairs restaurant. In the bakery, you can buy excellent French and West Indian sweets, breads, sandwiches, and fruit juices made fresh by owner Hermina Astaphan. The restaurant specializes in standard Créole favorites, and on Saturdays the chef cooks up the locally popular stew known as "goat water." You can hang out here all day just to people-watch. In the morning, order a plate of French toast and sit out on the green-and-white balcony overlooking Roseau. Then linger over a second cup of coffee while you go over plans for the day's activities. At lunch time, join local workers in the dining room for burgers and sandwiches, or enjoy a drink at the bar where you may pick up sightseeing tips from fellow travelers.

CARTWHEEL CAFE
On the Bayfront
Mary E. Charles Boulevard
☎ 767-448-5353
Monday through Saturday, 7:30am to 3:30pm
Sandwiches and light meals
$

This is a favorite. Clean. Sunny. Friendly. It sits directly across from the ship terminal near the landmark Royal Bank of Canada, which makes this small eatery a pleasant place to enjoy a delicious meal of familiar foods. Choose from sandwiches, soups, salads, omelettes, and other standard fare served in a historic building with stone walls, and windows that open directly onto the waterfront street. The friendly staff will remember you after just one visit.

BALISIER
Garraway Hotel on Bayfront
☎ 767-449-8800
Daily, 7:30am to 10:30pm
International
$$$$

You have a wonderful view of the Caribbean all the way to Scotts Head from this second floor dining room and adjoining balcony. There's probably no better place on the island to enjoy a full breakfast of fresh fruit juice and cooked-to-order egg and meat dishes. At lunch and dinner, the menu features goat, pork, and fish boldly seasoned with island spices or gently dressed with continental sauces. Even the vegetarian options are creative, well prepared, and beautifully presented. Fussy eaters appreciate this chance to avoid unfamiliar meats while still enjoying a fine meal in beautiful surroundings.

On Fridays, a bounty of West Indian and Créole dishes is served buffet style between 12:30pm and 2:30pm. This is an excellent way to try new foods and discover your own favorites. The ***Ole Jetty Bar***, located downstairs on Bayfront, is a popular spot for exotic drinks at sunset.

BLUE MAX CAFE
Corner of Kennedy and Old Street
☎ 767-449-8907
Monday through Saturday, 9am to 10pm
Deli and coffee bar
$

If Roseau has an all-occasion hangout, this is it. The casual décor and dependably delicious food draws locals and visitors who enjoy lingering over cappuccino and chatting with old friends and new acquaintances. Mediterranean dishes are a good choice, or build your own sandwich from a long list of meats and cheeses. The flying fish sandwich dressed with Créole sauce is famous. There's also an outstanding choice of desserts, including an almost-guilt-free double-chocolate cheesecake that claims to have no fat. Espresso is a powerful hit of Caribbean and South American coffees that could be the best on the island.

*The perfect beverage to accompany Créole food is Dominican-made **Kubuli** beer. It has won international medals for its smooth, fresh taste, which comes from German technology and pure Dominican water.*

SUTTON GRILLE
Sutton Place Hotel
25 Old Street
☎ 767-449-8700
Daily, 7am to 10pm
Créole
$$$$

The stone walls of this hotel restaurant have stood through 100 years of island weather. Now they enclose a courtyard and indoor dining room that serves hearty West Indian specialties and perfectly grilled fish and steaks. At lunch time, a buffet of meats, salads, and vegetables is popular with local office workers. Breakfast choices range from continental-style juice and rolls to island-style spiced fish and boiled bananas. Recently, the basement has been converted into the intimate **Cellar's Bar**. There's a limited à la carte menu, but the main feature is tropical drinks made of freshly squeezed juices and local rums. While the mood is often quiet and relaxed, occasionally a rowdy crowd will gather to watch the 50-inch TV or play a competitive round of darts.

MARQUIS DE BOUILLE RESTAURANT
Fort Young Hotel/Victoria Street
☎ 767-448-5000
Daily, 7am to 10pm
International/Créole
$$$$

The menu here leans toward the exotic, which fits perfectly with the surroundings in this newly expanded old waterfront fortress. Trendy singles and romantic couples meet poolside at **Balas Bar** for cocktail hour before moving on to the dining room for dinner. Hotel guests and special-occasion diners tend to fill the candlelit restaurant in the evenings, but a mixed crowd shows up for the theme buffets at lunch time during the week. New construction has added two additional eateries. The **Boardwalk Café,** which is open during the day for light meals and snacks, and the **Waterfront Restaurant,** which features a lunchtime buffet and a dinnertime international menu.

PORT OF CALL
3 Kennedy Avenue
☎ 767-448-2910
Daily, 8:30am to 11pm
Mixed menu
$$$

Try this newcomer for take-out or dine-in favorites from hamburgers to seafood. The full-service bar is a popular gathering place for the after-work crowd and fatigued tourists who enjoy local Kabuli beer and potent rum punches. (Happy Hour is every Friday from 6pm to 9pm.) The

menu includes a variety of local and international dishes with fish and mountain chicken among the specialties. In addition, the restaurant features an extensive wine list with choices to accompany every type of meal.

REIGATE MOUNTAIN-TOP
Morne Bruce
☎ 767-448-4031 or 767-448-4032
Daily, 7am to 10pm
International/Créole
$$$$

You must drive up a bumpy mountain road to reach this restaurant at Reigate Mountain-Top Resort outside the capital, but the trip is a wonderful sightseeing adventure, and the food is worth the trip. Plan to linger once you get there – the views are terrific. The kitchen turns out good international cuisine such as coq au vin, but the spicy Créole meals are their specialty. Try the thick *calalloo* soup, garlic-laced seafood, or spicy mountain chicken. All are delicious. For drinks, stop by **Penny Farthing Pub,** where the bartender mixes island favorites made with fresh fruits and local rum.

■ Castle Comfort

Hotels just south of Roseau cater to divers and adventurers with big appetites, so you can't go wrong at any of the following restaurants. Each is a bit different, but all emphasize friendly service and hearty portions of ultra-fresh cuisine.

OCEAN TERRACE
Anchorage Hotel
☎ 767-448-2638
Daily, 7am to 10pm
International/Créole
$$

You'll know it's Thursday when you see the crowds headed for the poolside barbecue buffet at the Anchorage Hotel. For US$20 you can chow down on ribs, chicken, fish, salads, and desserts while listening to live music. Other weekly events include Grill Night and Seafood Night. At other times, enjoy a mix of local, international, and vegetarian dishes served à la carte at the seaside restaurant. Call for a schedule of theme nights.

CRYSTAL TERRACE
Evergreen Hotel
☎ 767-448-3288 or 767-448-3276
Daily, 7:15am to 11pm
Créole
$$$

Dependably good Dominican cuisine served at the water's edge makes this large open-air restaurant a favorite with tourists. Inside, crystal chandeliers hang in the modern-style bar that specializes in tropical drinks. Creatively prepared local produce adds zest to the meat, chicken, and fish meals that start with spicy soup or fresh salads. For dessert, try the homemade cake topped with ice cream.

CASTLE COMFORT RESTAURANT
Castle Comfort Lodge
☎ 767-448-2188
Daily, 7:30am to 8:30pm
Local cuisine
$$$

Reservations are a must if you want to join the friendly group at these family-style spreads featuring dishes prepared with favorite family recipes. The clientele here is made up mostly of divers on packaged tours who are staying at the lodge, but you'll get a friendly welcome, as long as you let the staff know to expect you.

■ Scotts Head & Soufrière

Business owners in this sea-oriented area of Dominica are adventurous types, and the food they enjoy and prepare for others is an imaginative blend that reflects their attitude about all aspects of island life. The following serve outstanding cuisine.

SUNDOWNER CAFE
West Coast Road
☎ 767-448-7749
Tuesday through Sunday, 8:30am to midnight
Local specialties
$$

Sit in this open-air café and watch for dolphins playing offshore while you enjoy recently caught fish prepared by owner and chef Greg Herche. He cooks whatever is right off the boat, which may include lobster, prawns, crab, or octopus. You'll have a choice of grilled, fried, sauteed, Créole-style, or blackened, and the friendly staff will help you decide which you'll enjoy most. If you're not in the mood for seafood, you can order chicken, steak, or lamb. Vegetables and fruits come from a garden

that uses no chemicals, so every meal is fresh, healthful, and served with homemade bread.

If you're in the area late in the afternoon, stop at the Sundowner Café, order a rum punch and enjoy the sunset from this waterside spot.

SEABIRD CAFE
West Coast Road
☎ 767-448-7725
Daily, 11am to 9pm
Local specialties
$$

Halfway between Soufrière and Scotts Head, you'll find this open-air restaurant that's known for excellent soups, sandwiches, pizzas, and vegetarian casseroles. Pull up a stool to the breezy counter that overlooks Soufrière Bay or sit at one of the tables indoors or on the patio. Owner Kris Simelda is an American married to Jep, a Dominican. Her philosophy on food is that it should be fresh, creative, perfectly seasoned, and carefully prepared. You'll find her ideas deliciously carried out in every meal. In addition, she and her staff are an excellent source of information. Kris is an artist and art aficionado who shares her interest by displaying the work of several Caribbeans in the café. Everything is for sale.

■ In & Near Portsmouth

Heading north from Roseau on the main coastal road, you'll pass some pleasant restaurants connected with hotels. In Portsmouth itself, there are a few cafés on Bay Street, but the choices are limited.

CASTAWAYS BEACH HOTEL RESTAURANT
Méro Beach/West Coast Highway
☎ 767-449-6244
Daily, 7:30am to 10pm
Caribbean
$$$

Walk through the hotel lobby to the beautiful seaside restaurant, where you'll enjoy a variety of island specialties. You may want to stop first at the **Rhum Barrel** bar to sip a tropical drink. Then, ask for a table nearest the beach. Fish dominates the menu, and the island's spices, fruits, and vegetables are used to create a variety of dinner choices. Try the Mango Chicken with a tangy fruit-and-spice stuffing. On Sunday afternoons, locals and visitors gather on the beach for Castaway's weekly cookout. Favorites from the grill include lobster and saucy ribs.

FOUR SEASONS
Sunset Bay Club, Batalie Beach
☎ 767-446-6522,www.sunsetbayclub.com/restaurant.html
Daily, 7am to 10pm
Créole and International
Dinner reservations suggested
$$

Belgian owners Roger and Marcella Dutrieux and their daughter Katia recently opened this all-inclusive resort steps from secluded Batalia Beach south of Portsmouth. Plan to eat here even if you're not an overnight guest. The menu is varied and the food is delicious. Fresh fruits and vegetables are organically grown on site, and the chef uses whatever is ripe to prepare gourmet meals with European touches. Call ahead, especially during high tourist seasons, to reserve a table – and plan to enjoy an exotic rum drink at the bar before or after your meal.

LE FLAMBEAU
Picard Beach/Portsmouth Beach Hotel
☎ 767-445-5142
Daily, 7am to 10pm
Mixed menu
$$$

This casual restaurant sits near the water and attracts an eclectic mix of hotel guests, beach bums, and yacht owners. Local and international cuisine is on the menu, but there's also take-out food and snacks. Burgers and sandwiches are most popular with day-trippers looking for a quick bite or picnic provisions, and the potent drinks draw regulars in the evening. The open-air restaurant faces the beach and serves a well-priced variety of standard fare for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

MANGO'S
Bay Street, Portsmouth
☎ 767-445-3099
Daily, 8am to 11pm
Créole
$$

You'll spot this yellow and white building easily in the middle of town. Islanders and visitors keep Peter Pascal's place jumping from breakfast through dinner because of the casual Caribbean décor, central location, good prices, and tasty Créole food. Try the crayfish or mountain chicken when they're available, or fill up on spaghetti if you're craving a more familiar meal. On a pleasant evening, and they all are, sit outside on the porch that surrounds a large mango tree and enjoy a Kubuli beer or tropical drink.

SISTER SEA LODGE
Picard Estate/Prince Rupert's Bay
☎ 767-445-5211
www.avirtualdominica.com/sisters.htm
Créole
Daily, 7am to 10pm
$$

Harta and Elka are the two sisters who run this guest house and restaurant right on the beach. If you're in the area, stop to enjoy a drink at the seaside bar or stay for a meal on the comfortable patio. Fruit trees surround the property and provide shade and produce for many of the beverages and side-dishes prepared for guests. Fish, fresh from nearby waters, is the specialty, and you can choose from lobster, crayfish, crab, and octopus. Créole-style mountain chicken is a good option when it's in season. If you don't have plans for the afternoon, order a rum punch and stretch out in one of the hammocks. This is a true paradise.

■ Elsewhere on the Island

Small family-run restaurants are scattered throughout the island's mountainous interior and along the sparsely populated east coast. In general, they are the dining rooms of guest houses and inns that provide meals for overnight patrons. Most, however, welcome additional guests when they have enough help and provisions in the kitchen, but advance reservations are essential.

PAPILLOTE RAINFOREST RESTAURANT
Trafalgar Falls Road
☎ 767-448-2287
Daily, 7:30am to 10pm
Vegetarian and Créole
$$

Don't miss the experience of visiting this retreat in the Roseau Valley near the double Trafalgar waterfalls. If you don't stay here, make reservations for a meal. Cuthbert Jno. Baptiste oversees the planning and preparation of food in the thatch-roofed restaurant that overlooks a 14-acre garden tended by his wife, Anne. Eggs come from the resort's own chickens, and the fruits and vegetables are picked ripe from the garden. You'll enjoy huge salads, steaming vegetables, and island specialties such as *callaloo* soup, Créole-style flying fish, and marinated chicken cooked in banana leaves. Bring your swimsuit and enjoy a soak in one of the retreat's hot mineral pools for a user fee of EC$5.

FLORAL GARDENS RESTAURANT
Concord Village
☎ 767-445-7636
Daily, 7:30am to 9pm
Vegetarian/West Indian
$$$

Floral Garden sounds too "tearoom" for this hotel restaurant that occupies both sides of the road about three miles inland from Carib Territory. Flowers and greenery are everywhere, but inside the décor is rustic and the food is hearty. Backpackers fill up on agouti and crapaud when they return from treks through the adjoining rainforest, and newlyweds snuggle over a shared vegetarian dish. It's a place where everyone feels relaxed and welcome. When you visit, ask if owner Oliver (O.J.) Seraphin is in. He's a friendly host who enjoys talking about Floral Gardens and Dominica.

ALMOND BEACH RESTAURANT & BAR
East Coast Road, Calibishie
☎ 445-7783
Monday through Saturday, 8am to 8pm, closed Sundays
West Indian
$$

This family-owned spot is a fine place for a casual lunch or dinner when you're touring the Atlantic coast. Try one of the homemade flavored rums to unwind, then ask about the specials of the day. Mountain chicken and octopus are usually featured in season. At other times, choose grilled fish, lobster, or *callaloo* soup.

CALIBISHIE LODGES
Main Road Calibishie
☎ 767-445-8537
Daily, 7:30am to 9pm
International
$$

Meals are served on a balcony overlooking the pool and gardens of this modern lodge on the northeast coast. The chef gets up early to prepare meals for hotel guests, and he welcomes you to join them. Everything is made with fresh local products and the menu varies according to the season.

STEVE'S PLACE
Calibishie Coast
☎ 767-445-7006
Monday through Saturday, 11am to 9pm
West Indian
$$

Steve, the owner and chef of this casual balcony café, was trained in Trinidad and gained experience in the US and on several Caribbean Islands. He cooks with a natural talent that results in imaginative dishes. Call in advance if you want him to prepare a special fourcourse dinner for you. The à la carte menu includes salads, seafood, and Créole entrées.

Dominica A To Z

ATMs

ATMs dispense Eastern Caribbean dollars and are located at handy spots in Roseau and Portsmouth. One of the most convenient is at the **Royal Bank of Canada**, across from the cruise ship terminal on Bayfront in Roseau. You'll find other ATMs at the **Whitchurch IGA** grocery store on Old Street in Roseau, **Canefield Airport**, **Melville Hall Airport**, and at **National Commercial Banks** (NCB; there is one on Bay Street and another near the bookstore at Ross University in Portsmouth).

Banks

Banks are open Monday through Thursday, 8am to 3:30pm; and Friday, 8am to 5pm. Numerous banks are located on main roads in Roseau, including **NCB** and **Bank of Nova Scotia** on Hillborough Street, **Eastern Caribbean Central Bank** on Old Street, and **American International Bank** on Queen Mary Street. In Portsmouth, **Barclay's Bank** is on Old Street.

Credit Cards

Major credit cards are accepted by most hotels, shops, restaurants, tour agencies, and car rental companies in Roseau and Portsmouth. Gas stations require cash. Shops and cafés in smaller towns may not accept credit cards, and some businesses add a five-percent fee to prices if you do not pay by cash.

Currency

Dominican currency is the Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC$), which exchanges at EC$2.67 to US$1. Banks and ATMs offer the best exchange rate. US$ are widely accepted, but change is always returned in EC$.

Drinking Water

Tap water is safe to drink, but highly chlorinated. You can buy inexpensive bottled water that comes from the island's pure mountain springs, which tastes much better.

Drugs

Police strictly enforce Dominica's zero-tolerance laws. Don't get caught with illegal substances.

Emergency

Fire. . . . . ☎ 999
Police. . . . . ☎ 911

Hospitals

Princess Margaret Hospital, Goodwill. . . . . ☎ 767-448-2231
Marigot Hospital . . . . . ☎ 767-445-7091
Portsmouth Hospital . . . . . ☎ 767-445-5237

Fax & Internet Service

Cable & Wireless and **Marpin Telecommunications** provide the island with dial-up and DSL Internet service. If you bring a laptop, you'll need a surge suppressor to avoid damage to your computer from the island's frequent power irregularities.

In Roseau, browse or check e-mail at the **Cornerhouse Café,** near the Old Market, ☎ 767-449-9000. In downtown Portsmouth, surf the net at **Cyberland,** ☎ 767-445-4454.

All major **hotels** and **travel agencies** will allow you to send and receive faxes.

Local Interest

Books

The more you know about a destination, the more you'll enjoy it. The following books and video are excellent sources of information about Dominica's history, culture, and natural beauty.

- **Diving & Snorkeling Dominica**, *by Michael Lawrence, published by Lonely Planet, a guide book.*
- **Dominica: Isle of Adventure**, *third edition, by Lennox Honychurch, published by MacMillan, a travel guide.*
- **The Dominica Story**, *by Lennox Honychurch, published by MacMillan, history of the island.*
- **The Gardens of Dominica**, *by Polly Pattullo & Anne Jno. Baptiste (owner of Papillote Wilderness Retreat), published by Papillote Press, history and botanical information.*
- **Wide Sargasso Sea**, *by Jean Rhys, Dominica's most celebrated author, published by Penguin, a novel.*

Video

Dekouve Domnik, A Nature Island Safari, a 115-minute video with comprehensive coverage of all parts of the island and its marine area. Order by sending a check for US$26 to SPAT, PO Box 268, Roseau, Commonwealth of Dominica. ☎ 767-448-4377, fax 767-4482308, e-mail: spat@cwdom.dm. Shipping charges are included.

Taxes

Hotels assess a 5% government tax, which may be included in the quoted rate. **Hotels** and **restaurants** may add a 10% service charge to bills. A 3% **sales tax** is levied on most purchases.

Telephone

Dominica's **area code** is 767, and you may call the island from the US by dialing 1 + 767 + seven-digit local number. All pay phones are equipped for overseas and local dialing, and accept either phone cards (which can be purchased at most shops), credit cards, or EC coins. For **directory infor-**

mation while on the island, dial ☎ 118. Dial "0" for assistance with **international calls** from the island.

Time

Dominica is on **Atlantic Standard Time**, which is one hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time and four hours behind Greenwich Mean Time. Daylight saving time is not observed, so during those months Dominica is on the same time as the Eastern United States.

Tourist Information

DOMINICA TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICE
Old Market Plaza, Roseau
☎ 767-448-2186, fax 767-448-5840

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
P.O Box 293, Roseau☎ 767- 448-2045 , fax 767- 448-5840
www.ndcdominica.dm

DOMINICA OFFICE OF TOURISM
10 East 21st Street, Suite 600
New York, NY 10010
☎ 888-645-5637 or 212-475-7542; fax 212-475-9728

DOMINICA TOURIST OFFICE
1 Collingham Gardens
London, SW5 OHW
United Kingdom
☎ 44-171-370-5195, fax 44-171-373-8743

TOURIST WEB SITES
www.avirtualdominica.com
www.dominica.dm
www.natureisland.com

St. Lucia

What's Special About It?

St. Lucia (*Saint LOO-sha*) is one of the most beautiful and diverse islands in the Caribbean. Picturesque fishing villages bump up to golden-sand beaches, and towering mountains loom over sprawling banana plantations in deep green valleys. The island's landmark twin peaks, the **Pitons**, soar majestically out of clear turquoise waters that cover pristine coral reefs teeming with colorful tropical fish. World-class resorts, small inns, and private villas hide behind flowering shrubs tucked into rolling emerald hills below a lush rainforest.

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During the past decade, tourism has boomed here, spurred by increased cruise-ship traffic and plush new resort rooms. Yet you'll find large parts of the island surprisingly untamed and relatively underdeveloped. High-rise hotels are not permitted, eco-tourism is encouraged, and most natural resources are strictly protected by the government. Europeans caught onto the island's vast appeal years ago, and North Americans now are racing to visit before the place loses its "undiscovered" allure.

As one of the larger Windward Islands of the Lesser Antilles, 238-square-mile, pear-shaped St. Lucia measures 27 miles end-to-end and 14 miles across its widest section. Its nearest neighbors include Martinique (to the north), St. Vincent (to the southwest), and Barbados (to the southeast).

A third of the 163,000 residents live in or near the capital city, **Castries,** on the north end of the island. Ninety percent trace their ancestors back to Africa, and the same percentage claims to practice the Roman Catholic religion.

Life on St. Lucia is low-keyed and informal, which is one of the biggest attractions for visitors. With few exceptions, locals are friendly, helpful, and happy to include you in whatever's going on. Friday nights are for

partying, and you'll be welcome at the weekly jump-up at **Gros Islet**. Shortly after sunset, the streets are closed to traffic, bands set up their equipment on makeshift stages, and cooks fire up the barbecue grills on their front lawns. If you'd rather hang out at more touristy spots, you'll have a choice of nightly entertainment by steel bands, jazz groups, or calypso musicians at several upscale hotels, restaurants, and clubs.

Duty-free shopping is better on St. Thomas or St. Martin, but you'll find plenty of attractive buys at stores in downtown **Castries** and nearby **Pointe Seraphine**, a Spanish-style mall. Unique local arts and crafts, and West Indies herbs and spices are available at the open-air markets held in Castries as well as some of the outer villages.

If you're looking for adventure, St. Lucia has a bounty of choices. Watersports are popular, and the large hotels have equipment for surfing, skiing, and boating. Snorkelers and scuba divers give high praise to the healthy coral reefs located just off the quick-drop coastlines, and hikers say the rainforest in the mountainous interior offers some of the best treks in the Caribbean. In addition, the island has top facilities for golf, tennis, sailing, and horseback riding.

STATISTICS

Capital . . . . . Castries

Climate: Average daytime temperatures range from 23°C/75°F to 29°C/85°F at sea-level year-round. The driest months are January through April.

Language: The official language is English, but residents speak a Créole patois among themselves.

Location: St. Lucia is 21 miles south of Martinique and 26 miles north of St. Vincent in the Eastern Caribbean.

Political Status: St. Lucia is an independent state within the British Commonwealth. The monarchy is represented by an appointed governor-general, and a prime minister is the effective head of state.

Population: Approximately 160,000 people live on the island, with about one-third of the population residing in or near the capital city. Most residents are of African ancestry.

A full-color map of St. Lucia is located inside the book's back cover.

Snapshots

What would you see if you could fly low and slow over the island?

■ One **main road** hugging the western coast, which is washed by the gentle Caribbean Sea. The same road swinging around the southern curve, passing white-sand beaches, then heading north up the wilder eastern shore, which is pounded by breaking Atlantic waves.

■ A 19,000-acre **National Forest Reserve** dominating the center of the island.

■ A coastal outline of **sandy beaches** in various shades of gray, gold, and white.

■ Boats sheltered in **Rodney Bay**, an 83-acre man-made harbor, the largest and best-equipped marina south of St. Thomas.

■ The bustling capital of **Castries**.

■ Dive boats headed out to the marine park from the "old Caribbean" town of **Soufrière**.

■ Colorful fishing boats in the far-southern bay near historic **Vieux Fort**, where the turquoise Caribbean meets the blue Atlantic.

■ The **Maria Islands**, a protected haven off the southern coast for two indigenous species found nowhere else in the world: the innocuous Couresse grass snake and the Maria Islands ground lizard.

■ Wind-, kite- and board-surfers riding the breaking waves as they roll onto the beach at **Anse de Sables**.

■ The laid-back charming villages of **Micoud** and **Dennery** overlooking the Atlantic.

■ The bird-breeding grounds on the **Frégate Islands**, off the east coast near the tiny village of **Praslin.**

■ **Mount Soufrière**, a dormant volcano near the town of Soufrière, which is called the "drive-in volcano."

■ People dipping in natural **sulfur springs** that are rumored to have therapeutic properties.

■ The majestic twin peaks of the **Pitons** soaring dramatically out of the sea on the island's southwest side.

■ A causeway connecting **Pigeon Island National Park** to the northwest tip of the mainland.

A Brief History

The first people to live on the paradise island of St. Lucia were peaceful, artistic **Arawak Indians**, who populated most of the Caribbean Islands. They most likely arrived around AD 200 and supported themselves by hunting, fishing and farming. About AD 800, the Caribs made an aggressive appearance, conquered the Arawaks, set up villages, and named the island **Hewanorra**, "Land Where the Iguana Is Found."

Discovery

Many historians believe the island was first sighted by Europeans when Juan de la Cosa, one of **Christopher Columbus's** navigators, spotted land in that area in 1499. However, others allege that Christopher Columbus himself landed on St. Lucia on December 13, 1502. Records show that the island is not within the routes known to be explored by Columbus, and some scholars credit Spanish explorers with "discovering" the island later in the 16th century. For years, St. Lucians celebrated *Discovery Day* each year on December 13. However, the day has recently been renamed **National Day**.

■ The French, Dutch, & English

By 1520, St. Lucia was marked on a Vatican globe, but at that time it was merely a hideout for pirates and other bad chaps who wreacked havoc on legitimate businessmen trading in the islands. The most infamous was **François Le Clerc**, who the Spanish called *Pie de Palo* and the French labeled *Jambe de Bois* (leg of wood) because of his prosthetic limb.

Old Peg-Leg Le Clerc and his cohorts were joined on the island in 1600 when the Dutch military arrived and built a bastion at **Vieux Fort** on the far southern tip. Europeans didn't try to actually colonize St. Lucia until a few years later, and even that was an accident. In 1605 a British ship called *Olive Blossom*, under the command of Captain Nicholas St. John, blew off course, and her 67 passengers came ashore to seek refuge. For some reason, the Caribs sold a parcel of land and a few huts to the English refugees, allowed them time to settle in, then turned inhospitable. Most of the new colonists were killed by their Indian hosts, and the rest were forced off the island in makeshift boats.

A larger British group, under the commission of Captain Judlee, came over from St. Kitts in 1638, but the 300 settlers didn't fare much better, and all were killed or driven off St. Lucia within two years. Quite under-

standably, the English were hesitant to attempt colonization again for more than 20 years.

In 1651, a group came over from the nearby island of Martinique, lead by a Frenchmen named Rousselan. Aware of the trouble the English had experienced on St. Lucia, they quickly constructed a fort on what is now known as the **Vigie Peninsula**, armed it with cannons, and surrounded it with a moat. To further guarantee their safety, Rousselan married a Carib woman.

This Quixotic diplomacy worked well and French settlers spread south from the peninsula to a site across the natural harbor that they first called Petit Cul de Sac and later renamed **Castries**, in honor of an important French naval officer, Marquis de Castries. When Rousselan died in 1654, the Indians ended their unofficial peace treaty by killing the next three Frenchmen named governor of the island.

Learning of the renewed turmoil on St. Lucia, the British decided to try again to seize control. Battles between the French and English raged over the next 100 years, with the island's administration changing hands 14 times. During this time, most of the Caribs were killed or exiled. Finally, in 1763, the Treaty of Paris bestowed ownership to France.

With the indigenous people out of the way, St. Lucia settled into a stable, multi-cultural democracy, and colonists began to build roads and set up plantations. Soon, they were exporting sugar, cocoa, coffee, and spices to Europe. Warehouses sprung up along the wharf in **Castries**, and shops and homes were built along roads radiating inland from the bay.

Peace and prosperity were short lived, and the English and French were battling again by 1778. This time, the English won control of the island through agreements outlined in the 1814 **Treaty of Paris.** However, the British were indifferent about changing French customs, thus language, religious preference, place names, and cultural traditions remained decidedly French for the first half of the 19th century. Even today, the citizens of this English island speak a French-based patois that flows like thick honey from the back of the throat, and live in villages named Soufrière, Vieux Fort, and Gros Islet.

African Influences

A third culture also played a significant role in the island's character – that of Africa. Europeans brought African slaves onto the island by the boat load to work their plantations, so that while French and English customs were mingling among one segment of society, African traditions established a stronghold in another. Descendants of former slaves constitute the largest percentage of the island's present population, and their

proud heritage has survived to become the basis of St. Lucian culture today.

When slavery ended in 1834, plantation owners brought East Indians to the island as indentured servants. Their numbers were small compared to other nationalities, and their culture has almost disappeared. However, a significant East Indian community still lives in the area around Vieux Fort, and their foods and cooking methods are a popular addition to the island's cuisine.

The Government Today

Since February 22, 1979, St. Lucia has been an independent state within the **British Commonwealth**. Currently, Queen Elizabeth II, as head of state, designates a resident governor-general to head the island's democratic government, foster national unity, and promote national economic, cultural, and social interests. At press time, the queen's representative is **Her Excellency Dame Pearlette Louisy**, and the elected prime minister is the **Honorable Dr. Kenny D. Anthony**. Seventeen members of the **House of Assembly** are elected for five-year terms, and eleven members of the **Senate** are appointed.

Travel Information

Documentation

Citizens of the United States and Canada can visit St. Lucia for up to six months by showing an official document of citizenship, such as a **passport** or a certified **birth certificate**, plus a valid government issued **photo ID**. Visitors from most other countries must present a valid **passport** and may require a **visa**. All visitors are required to have a **return** or **ongoing ticket**.

Getting Here

By Air

St. Lucia has two airports and good air links from North America and Europe. International flights arrive at **Hewanorra Airport**, UVF, ☎ 758-454-6249, in Vieux Fort on the remote south coast. Smaller inter-island planes land on the shorter runway at **George**

F.L. Charles Airport (formerly called Vigie), SLU, ☎ 758-452-2596, near Castries. Both airports have tourist information counters where you can pick up maps and brochures. In addition, taxi stands and car-rental booths are at both locations. Neither airport has an official currency exchange office or bank, but the shops may give you EC$ for US$, though the rate may not be as good as at a bank in town.

Visitors from North American have a wide choice of flights to St. Lucia. **US Airways** has flights from Philadelphia, **BWIA** flies from Miami and New York, and **Air Jamaica** flies from New York. Travelers from Canada can take **Air Canada** from Toronto to Hewanorra on Saturdays, and Europeans travel on **Virgin Atlantic, British Airways,** and **BWIA** from London.

In addition, various international carriers provide nonstop jet service to Puerto Rico and other Caribbean Islands from gateway cities in North America and Europe. Once you're in the Caribbean, **American Eagle, LIAT,** and **Caribbean Star Airlines** offer many options for flying on to St. Lucia. Air service increases during the winter months, and additional airlines regularly begin new service, so search the Internet and check with a knowledgeable travel agent about added flights for the time you plan to travel.

FLYING TIME TO ST. LUCIA

From New York	4 hours
From Miami	3 hours
From Toronto	5 hours
From London	8 hours

■ Local Airline Reservation Numbers

Air Canada	☎ 758-452-3051 or 758-452-2550
Air Caraibes	☎ 758-452-2463 or 758-453-6660
Air Jamaica	☎ 758-453-6611 or 800-523-5585
Air Martinique	☎ 758-452-2463
American Eagle Airlines	☎ 758-454-6777 or 758-452-1820
British Airways	☎ 758-452-7444 or 758-452-3951
BWIA	☎ 758-452-3778
Helenair	☎ 758-452-1958
Caribbean Star	☎ 268-461-7827 (Antigua); 800-744-7827
LIAT	☎ 758-452-3051/452-2348
Virgin Atlantic	☎ 758-452-0866 (Spice Travel); 800-744-7477

When on St. Lucia, dial only the 7-digit local number. Do not dial the 758 area code. See Airlines *under* Travel Information*, page 29, for toll-free phone numbers.*

By Sea

■ Cruise Ships

Cruise ships dock almost daily at the terminals in **Castries. La Place Carenage** is near city-center on the south side of the seaport, and **Pointe Seraphine,** a newer terminal with aduty-free shopping mall is on the north side of the port. Taxis and tour operators meet the ships with offers to drive you around the island and show you the major sights. If you decide to take a tour, be sure you're clear on the itinerary, cost, and what's included. You may agree that admission fees are an acceptable extra charge, but stopping along the roadside to take pictures is not. Also, be sure you know whether prices are quoted in US or Eastern Caribbean dollars.

■ Ferry Service

L'Express des Iles operates high-speed catamaran service between Castries and the nearby islands of Martinique (1½ hours, EC$104/US$38), Dominica (3½ hours, EC$150/US$56) and Guadeloupe (5¾ hours, EC$180/US$67). For information and reservations, contact Cox & Co. in Castries ☎ 758-452-2211 or check the web site: www.express-des-iles.com.

■ Private Boats

If you're arriving on a private boat, you can dock at **Rodney Bay**, **Castries**, **Marigot Bay** and **Vieux Fort**. Rodney Bay and Marigot Bay offer shower facilities, restaurants, grocery stores, and maintenance shops. St. Lucia is also a popular place to begin a sailing charter, and both Rodney Bay and Marigot Bay have major charter centers that rent crewed and bareboat yachts and sailboats.

See Boating*, page 164, for information on boat rental.*

Getting Around

By Car

Driving is on the left in St. Lucia, and that can be a problem for visitors from non-British countries. If you want to give it a try, pay extra for automatic transmission, because shifting with your left hand on unfamiliar roads is no vacation. You must be at least 25 years old, hold a valid license from your home country (or an international license), and purchase a local license for about EC$54/US$21 in order to rent a car. All car rental agencies issue local permits, and you may also apply for one at the immigration offices at both airports or at any police station on the island.

Roads are fairly well maintained, if you judge by Caribbean standards. However, most roads are narrow and you have to expect hairpin curves in the mountains and kidney-pounding ruts along the coast and in the forest. All the secondary roads are challenging, and even the nicest resorts and out-of-the-way restaurants are often reached by unpaved lanes. If you plan to explore isolated areas, consider renting a four-wheel-drive vehicle.

You won't get lost if you stick to the main roads that connect the capital of Castries (northwest coast) to Vieux Fort (southern tip). One hugs the west coast, and another cuts through the center of the island via the town of Dennery, then runs south along the east coast until it connects to the west-coast road. Road signs are erratic, and some roads seem to have no name at all, but are known by locals as "the road to ...." The main turnoffs are marked, usually, but sometimes with a homemade sign that's faded over the years. Just know that all roads lead eventually to the main coastal roads, and you can find your way north or south from there.

During high season, expect to pay around EC$120/US$45 per day to rent a typical compact car with manual transmission and no air conditioning. From there, rates go up to about EC$265/US$100 per day for a fully equipped four-wheel-drive vehicle. Weekly and low-season rates usually are less.

If you're renting a manual-transmission vehicle, ask if the shift stick and steering wheel are located on the right or left side. You may find shifting with your left hand a difficult task, especially on the unfamiliar roads and steep inclines.

Some car agencies do not rent to anyone under the age of 25, and none rent to anyone younger than 21. If your regular car insurance doesn't cover you outside your home country or when driving a rental, plan to pay for your car with a credit card that guarantees coverage. Otherwise, expect to pay approximately EC$40/US$15 per day for additional collision and liability insurance.

CAR RENTAL COMPANIES

Avis . . . . . ☎ 758-451-6976
Budget (Castries) . . . . . ☎ 758-452-0233
Budget (Hewanorra) . . . . . ☎ 758-454-5311
Charley's Car Rental (Vieux Fort). . . . . ☎ 758-454-6448
CTL Car and Truck Leasing (Rodney Bay) . . . ☎ 758-452-0732
Hertz/Sun-Fun Car . . . . . ☎ 758-452-0680
Hertz (after hours) . . . . . ☎ 758-452-0742
Cool Breeze Jeep Rental (Soufrière) . . . . . ☎ 758-459-7729
Cost Less Rent-a-Car . . . . . ☎ 758-450-3416
Cost Less (pager) . . . . . ☎ 758-481-7376
Courtesy (Gros Islet) . . . . . ☎ 758-452-8140
Economy . . . . . ☎ 758-451-7997
Guy's Car Rental (Castries) . . . . . ☎ 758-451-7147
National Car Rental (Charles Airport) . . . . . ☎ 758-452-3050
National Car Rental (Hewanorra). . . . . ☎ 758-454-6699
West Coast Jeep & Taxi Service . . . . . ☎ 758-459-5457

By Bus

There is no scheduled bus service on St. Lucia. Private minivans provide public transportation, and they are an inexpensive way to get around. However, they are usually crowded with locals playing loud music, their routes don't cover all the island, and schedules can be erratic. If you want to give it a try, stands are located in **Castries** on **Darling Road** and near the public market on **Jeremie Street**. All vans are marked with their route number and destination point, and have the letter "**H**" on the license plate. Outside the city, you can flag down a van along the main roads, but most service to the south stops late in the afternoon. Buses run more frequently and later in the north, and on Friday nights they usually transport partygoers to and from **Gros Islet** until 10 or 11 o'clock.

The typical fare from Castries to Gros Islet is about EC$7/US$2.50 and from Castries to Vieux Fort around EC$8/US$3. Pay the drivers directly, and try to have correct change. Islanders are helpful when it comes to finding the bus stops and correct van, just tell them where you want to go.

By Taxi

Private taxis wait outside the airport, cruise-ship terminal, and major hotels. Many are vans that carry six to eight passengers, and you'll be able to identify them by their red license plates marked "**TX**." They don't have meters, so negotiate a fee before you climb aboard. Most drivers belong to a reputable cooperative that charges government-regulated fares, and, with few exceptions, all are knowledgeable and polite.

Expect to pay about EC$15/US$5.50 to go the short distance from Charles Airport to Castries, and approximately EC$140/US$52 to go from Hewanorra Airport to Castries, a 40-mile, one-hour trip.

Hewanorra Airport is on the far south end of the island, and most tourist areas are on the north end, more than an hour away by car. Expect your taxi fare from the airport to your hotel to run EC$140/US$52 to EC$180-/US$67. Since a one-day car-rental fee is about the same or less, consider renting a car at the airport when you arrive.

You can also hire a taxi to take you on a private tour around the island for about EC$55/US$20 per hour or EC$400/US$150 per day for up to four people. This fee is set by the driver, not the government, so you may be able to negotiate a bargain price, especially during a tourist-season lull.

TAXI SERVICES

Ben's Taxi Service . . . . . ☎ 758-459-5457
Courtesy Taxi Co-Op . . . . . ☎ 758-452-1733
Gros Islet Taxi Association . . . . . ☎ 758-452-0913
Holiday Taxi Co-Op . . . . . ☎ 758-452-6067
North Cloud Taxi Association . . . . . ☎ 758-450-0431
North Lime Taxi Association . . . . . ☎ 758-452-8562
Northern Taxi Association . . . . . ☎ 758-450-0431
Reliable Taxi Service . . . . . ☎ 758-452-5831
Soufrière Taxi Service . . . . . ☎ 758-459-7149
Southern Taxi Association . . . . . ☎ 758-454-6136
Vigie Taxi Association . . . . . ☎ 758-452-1599

By Water Taxi

Water taxis are a great way to get around the coastal areas. You can find small motor boats waiting along the docks in Castries, Rodney Bay, Marigot Bay, and Soufrière to zip passengers from one side of the bay to another or to a beach or seaside restaurant. Some of the boats also offer sightseeing tours along the coast. One-way quick trips run about EC$25/US$10, and sightseeing tours cost around EC$300/US$100 per hour for four to six passengers.

Ask for information on water taxis at any marina office or business flanking the water. If you plan to have a meal at one of the seaside restaurants, call ahead to ask if they provide complimentary water taxi service or recommend a particular driver. In addition, you can check with the **Rodney Bay Ferry**, ☎ 758-452-0087, or **Soufrière Water Taxi Association**, ☎ 758-459-7239.

Festivals, Events & Holidays

The St. Lucia Event Calendar is packed with festivals and holidays, so you can count on being on the island for some type of celebration. If you consider yourself a party animal, make early reservations for **Carnival**, which kicks off in July. Music lovers may prefer the **Jazz Festival,** an international event that draws big crowds each May. If you don't want to hassle with a major extravaganza, but still want to dance to some good Caribbean music, just show up in the little town of **Gros Islet** on any Friday night for the weekly street party known as **jump-up**.

ANNUAL BANK CLOSING DAYS

January 1 . . . . . New Year's Day
January 2 . . . . . New Year's Holiday
February 22 . . . . . Independence Day
May 1 . . . . . Labor Day
First Monday in August . . . . . Emancipation Day
October 5 . . . . . Thanksgiving Day
December 13 . . . . . National Day
December 26 . . . . . Boxing Day

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Good Friday	March or April
Easter	March or April
Whit Monday	Eighth Monday after Easter
Corpus Christi	Ninth Thursday after Easter
Christmas Day	December 25

If you want to be on the island for any of St. Lucia's special events and holidays, get a current schedule and reservation information from the **St. Lucia Tourist Office**, ☎ 800-456-3984 (US), 0-870-900-7697 or 44-171-431-3675 (UK), 416-703-0141 (Canada), 758-452-4094 (St. Lucia), www.stlucia.org, www.st-lucia.com.

Carnival

Traditionally, the Carnival Season begins in February and leads up to Mardi Gras on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, but in 1999 the St. Lucian Cultural Development Foundation decided to move the island's biggest blow-out celebration to July, so that it wouldn't conflict with pre-Lenten festivals held on other Caribbean Islands.

St. Lucia's Carnival is the ultimate multi-day bash. Most official activities take place in and around the capital city of Castries, but warm-up parties and concerts are held all over the island. Various camps are set up for the production of costumes for the many shows and street parades, and calypso tents boom with the traditional sounds of local musicians.

Each music tent has a team of dancers who organize a series of shows leading up to the main calypso competition. It's meant to introduce the public to current songs, and the audience is encouraged to participate by showing their approval or rejection of the performance. After a series of competitions judged by the St. Lucian Calypsonians Association, the finalists compete for the title of **Reigning Calypso Monarch**. Soca music, with a faster beat than calypso, gets its due with a competition for **Soca Monarch,** and one song wins title of **Road March,** the official lyrics and tune Carnival for the current year.

For exact dates and more information on Carnival, contact the St. Lucian Cultural Foundation ☎ 758-452-1859, www.stluciancarnival.com.

Jazz Festival

St. Lucia's **Jazz Festival** in May is similar to Jamaica's Sunsplash, except the music is jazz instead of reggae. Renowned musicians from all

over the world perform during the exquisite festival, which has become an internationally recognized event. Since 1999, free-of-charge performances known as **The Fringe** take place all over the island and include music other than jazz.

Main concerts take place in Castries, Rodney Bay, and on picturesque Pigeon Island, where performers are showcased on a sand stage with historic buildings and the ocean in the background. Smaller shows are held on open-air stages in Soufrière and Vieux Fort.

Acoustical/straight-ahead jazz highlights the main concerts, but you may also hear new age, fusion, and rhythm-and-blues performed by international stars. If you prefer steel drums, salsa, or reggae, just ask around. Bands playing all types of music show up to perform at mid-day picnics in the park and at late-night clubs.

Jazz Festival travel packages are put together by **Air Jamaica Vacations** (☎ 800-523-5585, www.airjamaica.com), **Alken Tours** (☎ 800-327-9974), and **London Elite** (☎ 020-7610-0245). For ticket information and a schedule of events contact the **Jazz Shop**, ☎ 758-451-8566, www.stluciajazz.org.

International Créole Day

Jounen Kwéyòl Entenasyonnal or **International Créole Day** is held late in October. On this day, Créole people on many Caribbean Islands celebrate their joint language and culture. Small villages on St. Lucia host a series of parties featuring island foods, crafts, music, and cultural displays. It's a great day of partying and fun, but the traffic all over the island is horrendous. Everyone tries to hop from village to village to visit their friends and participate in all the activities, so the roads become hopelessly gridlocked. Overlook this inconvenience and go anyway. It may be your only opportunity to taste the "national dish," greenfig-and-saltfish.

National Day & The Feast of St. Lucy

December 13th is **National Day** as well as the **Feast of St. Lucy.** For many years, the islanders referred to this date as Discovery Day in the belief that Christopher Columbus landed on their island December 13, 1502. However, logs of the voyages show that Columbus was nowhere near the area on that date, and facts about the actual "discovery" by anyone other than Arawak Indians are vague. But a celebration is still appropriate, and the island's patron saint is celebrated in style. Lantern-lit

processions, traditional music, cultural activities, sporting events, and a bounteous feast of local food are dedicated to St. Lucy and the nation.

Touring The Island

By Boat

Several spots on St. Lucia must be seen from the water in order to discover their true magnificence. Consider renting a small boat on your own, or sign up for a guided group cruise. Many of the hotels arrange full-day and half-day boating excursions, or you can contact the tourist offices in Castries, ☎ 758-452-4094, or Soufrière, ☎ 758-459-7419, for a list of cruise operators. Expect to pay about EC$125/US$40 for a half-day trip that includes drinks and snorkeling, and around EC$200/US$75 for a full-day on the water with lunch, drinks, and snorkeling.

Another possibility is to take a tour by water taxi. The drivers are usually natives who know the coastline well, and their rates are reasonable. Their impromptu stories often are more entertaining than those of a professional guide. Expect to pay about EC$55/US$20 per hour or EC$300/US$112 per day for a private water tour for two to four people. Some drivers will supply sandwiches and drinks, but others expect you to bring your own.

■ Day-Cruise Operators

MV *Vigie* is a 56-foot motor boat that makes runs from Rodney Bay Marina to Pigeon Island (half-day) or Soufrière and the Pitons (full-day). Lunch and snorkeling are included in the daylong tour. ☎ 758-452-8232.

The *Unicorn* is a 140-foot replica of a 19th-century two-masted brig. Captain Andy takes passengers on a full-day cruise from Vigie Cove to Soufrière with inland sightseeing trips by coach. He also offers a champagne sunset cruise down the west coast. ☎ 758-452-8811; www.sunlinktours.com/adventuresafloat/tours/brigunicorndaysail.

Endless Summer has two 56-foot catamarans, *Endless Summer I* and *Sunkist*, which leave Rodney Bay for full-day sightseeing tours along the west coast, half-day snorkeling tours along the northwest coast, and sunset party cruises. ☎ 758-450-8651, www.skyviews.com/stlucia/endlesssummer.

St. Lucia has a number of protected marine sites. If you rent your own boat, be sure to ask about restricted areas where boating, fishing, and unguided diving are not allowed.

Whether you're on your own or in a group, be sure your water tour includes **Marigot Bay**, one of the most beautiful coves in the Caribbean. This pristine blue-green lagoon lies at the end of a long, narrow inlet that cuts into the hilly coast south of Castries. It's completely sheltered and features a palm-shaded white-sand beach. From land it is stunningly gorgeous, but from the water, it is even more sensational.

Many day-trip boats make a stop at **Anse Cochon**, three miles south of Marigot, just past the rocky headland that marks the small community of **Anse La Raye.** Brightly painted fishing boats decorate the bay, and snorkelers bob face-down in the water to view the coral and fish surrounding offshore boulders.

The **Soufrière Marine Management Area** (SMMA, ☎ 758-459-5500) encompasses much of the west coast from **Anse Chastanet** to south of the **Pitons**, so you must know the regulations or be with a guide who does. Boating, fishing, and diving are highly restricted in order to preserve the coral reefs, fish stocks, and beaches. You can visit many of the beaches by car, but plan to take a boat tour. Looking back at the twin peaks of the soaring green Piton mountains is worth every Eastern Caribbean dollar you spend for a guide.

By Helicopter

St. Lucia Helicopters offers three aerial tours of the island: a 10-minute flight over the northwest coast (EC$130/US$55); a 20-minute soar over the west coast, south of Castries, including the rainforest (EC$260/US$95); a 30-minute trip that includes everything normally seen on the 10- and 20-minute flights (EC$350/US$130); ☎ 758-453-6950, www.stluciahelicopters.com.

By Car

It's quite possible to make a complete tour of St. Lucia by car in one long day. However, we suggest you allot a full day to the northwest region, allowing time for a walking tour of the capital city. On another day, cover the west coast and Soufrière marine reserve and, on a third day, drive around the southern tip and up the rugged eastern coast. You may wish to take side trips into the center of the island to

see the rainforest, even if you plan to devote entire days to hiking the most scenic areas.

Pick up maps, brochures, and magazines at one of the tourist offices before you set off to explore the island. Kiosks are located at both airports and both cruise-ship terminals. The offices on the lower level of the Pointe Seraphine and La Place Carenage shopping complexes have the best stock of free material as well as the most dependable hours (8am to 4:30pm, Monday to Friday, and anytime a cruise ship arrives, ☎ 758-452-4094).

■ Castries

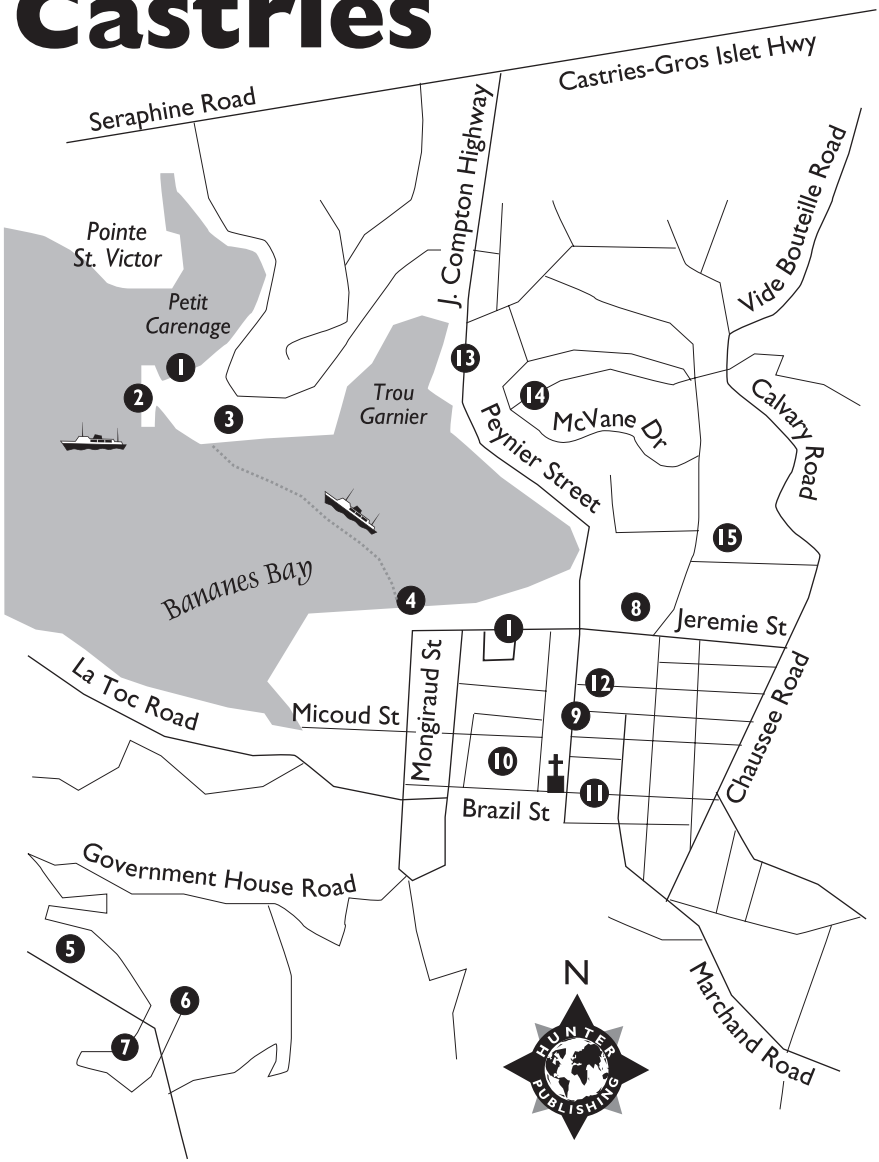
Be forewarned that the capital is not a beautiful city. Fires have destroyed most historical buildings, so your first impression will be that **Castries** is a concrete commercial center without character. However, the setting between rolling green hills and a turquoise sea is lovely, and residents radiate an infectious exuberance that puts visitors into an adventurous vacation mood.

Before you tour the city on foot, take a trip to the top of 835-foot **Morne Fortuné**, in the hills south of town, for a panoramic view of all the action. This hilltop was coveted by French and English troops during the 18th and 19th centuries because of its high vantage point over the coast. **Fort Charlotte** was started at the summit by the French in 1768 and expanded by the British over years of back-and-forth rule by both countries.

Today, surviving buildings have been renovated to serve as **Sir Arthur Lewis College** (☎ 758-452-5507), and you can walk around the grounds for a good view north to Pigeon Point and south to the Pitons. From here, it's easy to understand why the Morne was so heavily fought over. (On a clear day, Martinique is visible far to the north.)

On the way down the Morne, stop at the lookout below **Government House** for a good view of Castries and the natural harbor. Government House was built in 1895 and is still the official residence of the governor general. The sprawling English arts-and-crafts-style mansion was considered a "scandalous waste of money" and "a piece of costly extravagance, out of proportion with our means" when it was built. Today it seems an appropriate showplace for the island. The grounds are patrolled by an impressive royal guard, and the gardens hold a wide variety of tropical flora. Stop by to see the national plant (bamboo), tree (calabash), and flower (rose and marguerite) in a spectacular setting.

Castries



1. Tourist Office (two locations)
2. Cruise Ship & Ferry Dock
3. Pointe Seraphine Duty Free Shops
4. North Wharf; La Place Carenage; Customs Office
5. Government House
6. Morne Fortuné
7. Sir Arthur Lewis College
8. Castries Market
8. Constitution Park; Court House
9. Derek Walcott Square; Library
10. Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
11. Town Hall
12. To George F.L. Charles Airport
13. National Cultural Centre
14. King George V Gardens

NOT TO SCALE

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WHO WAS SIR ARTHUR LEWIS?

Arthur Lewis was born on St. Lucia on January 23, 1915, to school teachers who had immigrated from the island of Antigua. His father died when he was seven years old, and Lewis completed high school by the age of 14. This left him too young to apply for a college scholarship and too poor to pay for his own education. He went to work as a civil service clerk, but won a government scholarship to study in England in 1932.

Lewis wanted to study engineering but, at that time, young blacks weren't being educated or hired as engineers. As an alternative, he signed up to study business administration at the London School of Economics (LSE) and planned to return to St. Lucia to work in government or private business. A quote from Lewis' autobiography says, "I had no idea in 1933 what economics was, but I did well in the subject from the start, and when I graduated in 1937 with first class honours, LSE gave me a scholarship to do a PhD in Industrial Economics."

After graduation, Lewis took a job at the university of Manchester in England, taught economics, and was knighted for extraordinary service to the kingdom in 1963. That same year, he was offered a full professorship at Princeton University. Many undergraduate students still read his history of world economics, *The Theory of Economic Growth*.

In 1979, Lewis shared the Nobel Prize for Economics with American Theodore Schultz. Not bad for a small-island orphan who didn't know the meaning of economics when he started college. He died in 1991, at the age of 76.

Some locals use the French pronunciation, "for-tune-AY" for the bougainvillea-covered mound whose name means "Good Luck Hill." However, many refer to the hill and surrounding area as simply "The Morne."

The mansion houses **Le Pavillon Royal Museum** (a collection of flags, photos, official documents, and historical items), which is open for public tours Tuesdays and Thursdays 10am to noon and 2pm to 4pm. You must make an appointment to join a tour; call ☎ 758-452-2481 between 8am and 4:30pm, Monday to Friday, or e-mail museum@stluciagovernmenthouse.com; www.stluciagovernmenthouse.com/lepavillonroyalmuseum.

Back in Castries proper, seek out **Derek Walcott Square** on Brazil Street south of the bay. The park is named for one of St. Lucia's two Nobel Prize winners (Sir Arthur Lewis won the prize for Economics in 1979).

WHO IS DEREK WALCOTT?

Derek Walcott and his twin brother, Roderick, were born in Castries, St. Lucia, in 1930. Their father, a watercolor artist, died when the boys were young, and their mother raised them while running the island's Methodist school. Derek studied at St. Mary's College on St. Lucia, and later attended the University of the West Indies in Jamaica.

At the age of 18, Derek published *25 Poems*, but he is better known for a later collection, *In a Green Night,* published in 1962, and *Omeros,* an epic work published in 1990. During his long career as a poet, playwright and artist, he has devoted his time to the **Trinidad Theatre Workshop**, which he founded in 1959; to **Boston University**, where he currently teaches literature and creative writing; and to **St. Lucia**, where he maintains a home.

Among his most recent works is the musical *The Capeman,* written with singer Paul Simon, and performed on Broadway. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992. His many other honors include the 1971 Obie Award for *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, and the 1988 Queen's Medal for Poetry.

Across Laborie Street from the east side of the square, you'll see the stone **Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**, which was begun around 1895 and completed in 1931. Go inside the church to see Biblical scenes painted by internationally renowned St. Lucian artist **Dunstan Saint-Omer** (notice his trademark black Christ). Fresh flowers sit on side altars and candles give off a lovely light. If you attend mass on Sunday, you will be in the company of parishioners decked out in their multicolored best. Services are at 7:30pm Saturday and 6am and 7:30am Sunday. A children's mass is on Sundays at 10:30am. ☎ 758-452-2271.

Dunstan Saint-Omer designed the St. Lucian flag, and he and his sons painted the mural depicting scenes of island life on Manoel Street near the Banana Growers Association building. Alwyn, the eldest son, now manages the Saint-Omer Ad Agency and Art Gallery in Castries, and his delightful, brilliantly colored paintings are featured on the map handed out by the tourist office.

Architecture buffs will want to wander down **Brazil Street** to view the Colonial West Indian buildings that have withstood hurricanes and fires over the years. Castries' oldest French-style wooden buildings surround

Walcott Square. These were once the homes of European aristocrats who colonized the island. Some are now shops, but most are private residences and closed to the public. One of the most attractive is a green-trimmed white house across from the square. It was built in 1885, about the same time as its gingerbread-embellished neighbors. A 400-year-old saman tree grows on the eastern side.

A saman *tree is also called a rain tree because its abundant leaves are thick and hold rain water. After a shower, the tree drips water, and appears to "rain" long after the sky has cleared.*

The **Castries Market** and **Vendors' Arcade** is on Jeremie and Peynier streets. A bright orange-red roof covers one area; stalls spill out of the buildings and spread along both sides of the road. You can't help getting caught up in the vibrant excitement as merchants invite you to sample their wares. Saturday mornings are the busiest time, but things get chaotic when a cruise ship is in port, too. Booths are stocked with fresh produce, straw baskets, wood carvings, T-shirts and local crafts. Follow the smoke and enticing aromas coming from behind the market to the restaurant stalls that serve up generous, but inexpensive, meals featuring fish, rice, and vegetables.

If you want to do a little shopping before leaving town, stroll down Jeremie Street toward the bay to **La Place Carenage**. This waterfront shopping complex is a converted cargo shed. It has housed duty-free shops for years and was recently spruced up and expanded to include 27,000 square feet of new shops, art galleries, and restaurants. The top floor features an interactive historical display, and a new well-stocked tourist office is located on the ground floor. Shops and offices are open Monday through Friday, 9am to 4pm, and Saturday, 9am to 1pm. If a cruise ship is in port, they are open on Sunday, 9am to 4pm.

Take a water taxi from the downtown wharf to **Pointe Seraphine**, a Spanish-style shopping mall on the south shore of the Vigie Peninsula. It is now outsized by La Place Carenage, but it still has about two dozen upscale shops. It was built a decade ago on reclaimed land at the north end of Castries' inner harbor adjacent to two cruise-ship berths. It's laid out around a pleasant courtyard and houses the usual international duty-free stores, local boutiques, a bank, several restaurants, a tourist information office, and a car rental agency. Most businesses are open Monday through Friday, 9am to 5pm, and Saturday, 9am to 2pm. If a cruise ship is in port, they are open Sunday from 9am to 5pm. You may leave your car in the multi-level parking lot opposite the Castries Market on John Compton Highway for EC$1.50/US$.60 per hour; the water taxi is about EC$2.60/US$1. If you are taking the water taxi the other way, parking at Pointe Seraphine is free.

*You can take a **Heritage Walk** through the streets of Castries with a guide from the St. Lucia Heritage Tourism Association. Call for times and information, ☎ 758-451-6220; www.heritagetoursstlucia.com.*

■ Northwestern Tour

Castries to Pointe du Cap

Highlights

- The marina at **Rodney Bay**
- The fishing town of **Gros Islet** (site of Friday night jump-ups)
- **Pigeon Point National Park**
- **Point du Cap**, the northernmost point

Take the well-maintained John Compton Highway north out of Castries, connect with the Gros Islet Highway, and continue north past George F.L.Charles Airport. A left turn to the west and another left turn onto Peninsular Road will bring you parallel to **Vigie Beach**. The water is calm, and the beach is popular with locals although the sand is dingy and often littered. Follow the road uphill to the far western tip, where you will see some government buildings (built in the late 1800s by the military) and a lighthouse. You can't get into the lighthouse, but the views from here are excellent. (In French, vigie means lookout.)

Back on the Gros Islet Highway, heading north, you'll pass some unsightly commercial and industrial sites before you come to **Choc Bay** and its superb beach. Watch for turnoffs that lead to the water. Several beach bars and restaurants line the golden sand, and you can enjoy lunch or a snack while observing **Rat Island** a short distance offshore. Arawak Indians once lived on the outer island, and people with communicable diseases were banished there in the 1800s, but the place is uninhabited now. Nobel laureate Derek Walcott has set up the Rat Island Foundation to attract investors to develop the island into an artist retreat, but visitors aren't allowed, for now.

Rodney Bay & Gros Islet

Continue north on the Gros Islet Highway to Rodney Bay, an 80-acre protected lagoon that opens to the sea through a man-made channel cut between Reduit Beach and the village of Gros Islet. The large, modern marina is a popular stop for yachtsmen, and the bay is surrounded by res-

taurants, bars, water-sports centers and shops. If you're stuck for something to do, just stroll around and look at all the magnificent boats.

WHO WAS ADMIRAL GEORGE RODNEY?

George Brydges Rodney began his long career in the British navy in 1732 at the age of 14. He was an admiral in 1782 when he used the bay that bears his name as a base of operations for his memorable victory over the French in the "Battle of the Saints."

In the spring of that year, François de Grasse commanded the French fleet stationed on nearby Martinique. Rodney was keeping on eye on de Grasse from an observation point on Pigeon Island, so he saw the 33 French ships sail into the Caribbean to join forces with their Spanish allies stationed on Haiti. Suspecting that the French-Spanish fleets intended to attack Britain's major stronghold on Jamaica, Rodney set out with 37 ships to intercept de Grasse.

The two admirals met head-on in the waterway between Guadeloupe and Dominica near the archipelago of tiny islands known as Iles des Saintes. On the morning of April 12th, both fleets positioned themselves ready for the major battle, but Rodney ordered his captains to break formation from "line ahead" and burst through the middle of the French line. This ungainly move confused the French, who had no strategy for countering such an attack.

The British fleet splintered the French ships into three unequal contingents, and De Grasse was unable to regroup. With the French fleet completely disorganized, de Grasse surrendered his flagship; Rodney and his men emerged the victors with seven French ships in captivity. The loss crippled the French campaign in the Caribbean, and secured Britain's power on key islands.

De Grasse was the first French naval commander ever to be taken in combat, making Rodney the first to capture a French fleet commander in a battle as well as the first commander to successfully challenge the orthodox British navy "Fighting Instructions." King George III of England honored Rodney by granting him the title of baron.

Take a cab to and from jump-up, because parking and traffic are a nightmare. Dress casually and conservatively in cool clothing. Bring just enough Eastern Caribbean cash to see you through the evening, and leave all other valuables locked up at your hotel. Stick to the main streets, and be sensible about what you eat and drink.

A mangrove swamp originally separated the small settlements of Rodney Bay and Gros Islet, but a channel was cut between the two to create a magnificent harbor. You will see the marina on your left just after you pass the JQ Charles Mall, heading north on the Gros Islet Highway. To get into town and onto **Reduit Beach**, turn left onto a signed road just before the shopping center.

Spend some time at the marina and on the long, beautiful beach. The town itself is nothing special, but you can book all types of watersports and cruises here, and you'll find plenty of restaurants, bars, and gift shops. A ferry runs from the south end of the marina to Pigeon Island (EC$27/US$10 round-trip or EC$125US$50 for a day-trip, including lunch); ☎ 758-452-8816.

Gros Islet, on the north side of the harbor, is a charming little fishing village with a few narrow streets lined with brightly painted wooden island-style houses and not much going on – until Friday. On Friday night, you won't be able to get near the place. Streets are blocked off, rum shops expand out onto the sidewalks, grills set up on front lawns and street corners sizzle with enticing aromas, and *soca* blares from huge speakers on the main strip. Residents from all over the island join tourists for this weekly blowout, known as jump-up, which lasts long into Saturday morning. Do not miss this incredible transformation. It's a lot of fun even if you don't dance, hate current music trends, detest alcohol, and never eat street-vendor food.

If you're driving to Gros Islet, turn off the highway from Castries onto Dauphine Street, just north of Rodney Bay Marina. Don't plan to spend much time in town, because there's little to see. The only interesting structure is the Catholic church on the north side of the village. **St. Joseph the Worker** was built in 1926 on the site of another church that was destroyed by an earthquake 20 years earlier.

Pigeon Point

Once called Pigeon Island, this historic spit of land was connected to the main island by a causeway back in the 1970s, and is now officially named Pigeon Point. The 40-acre site at the tip of the man-made peninsula still is known as Pigeon Island National Park. You

can now drive out to the "island" to explore the scattered remains of **Fort Rodney.** The landscaping and views are spectacular.

Well before legitimate Europeans settled on St. Lucia, corrupt Frenchman **François le Clerc** (nicknamed *Jambe de Bois* because of his wooden leg) hid out on Pigeon Island with the booty he collected from raids on Spanish ships. Two hundred years later, English troops, under the command of Admiral George Rodney, built fortresses on the small island so they could safely spy on French forces stationed on nearby Martinique. After England and France settled their multi-year battle for control of the eastern Caribbean, everyone lost interest in Pigeon Island, and the fort slowly disintegrated into ruins.

Now that a causeway connects Pigeon Point to the main island, the St. Lucia National Trust, ☎ 758-452-5005, has restored some of the buildings and developed the entire area into an attractive park. You'll want to allow plenty of time to wander along the winding paths, explore the ruins that are scattered over 44 acres, linger on the two beaches, and visit the museum. You will have wonderful panoramic views from many places inside the park, but one of the most spectacular is the same one English troops had of Martinique from the well-preserved fort at the top of **Rodney Hill**. From there, you can walk less than a mile up to Signal Peak for another sensational view back at St. Lucia and across both the Atlantic and Caribbean waters.

The park is open daily, 9am to 5pm. A day pass costs EC$10/US$4 and includes entrance to the park and admission to the museum and interpretive center. A 10-day pass is also available for EC$30/US$12, so you'll break even if you visit the park at least three times. (Children 5-12 years old get in for EC$2.67/US$1.) The **public beach** offers more than a half-mile of soft sand leading to calm water with good snorkeling conditions, and you can buy refreshments from vendors. More substantial snacks and lunch are available at the waterside **Jambe de Bois Restaurant**; ☎ 758-450-8166.

The **Pigeon Island Museum and Interpretive Centre** is located near the entrance to the park in the restored British officers' mess hall. Displays include Arawak artifacts found on Pigeon Island and a multi-media presentation of St. Lucia's history. A gift shop sells rum produced on the island and a variety of souvenirs and books. You can stop downstairs at the English-style **Captain's Cellar** for a pint of local beer (Piton) or a sandwich before you explore the park grounds. Open 10am to 11pm, Wednesday through Monday, and 10am to 5pm on Tuesday; ☎ 758-450-0918.

Several marked walking trails run through the park and out to the ruins of Fort Rodney. Most of the old buildings are in fairly bad shape, but they still make an impressive backdrop to the annual Jazz Festival that St. Lucia hosts in May. Stroll along the paths and stop frequently to admire

the fantastic views. You'll understand why pirates used the island as an ambush point and hideout, and why Admiral Rodney camped out here to spy on the French stationed on Martinique Island. Bring binoculars to watch for birds that migrate through the Caribbean.

Pigeon Island was named for the common wood pigeons (also called redneck pigeons) that once nested on the island. You can see them at the Mini Zoo adjacent to the Union Nature Reserve (see Hiking, *page 172, for more information).*

A trail along the south shore leads to a shaded military cemetery, where you can wander among 18th-century monuments that mark the graves of British servicemen who died on the island. Take the signed trail leading to the north side of the Point, where you can climb up to **Signal Hill**, a fairly gentle 15-minute hike. This was the main lookout station for the British navy, and you will have exceptional views of both the island's Caribbean and Atlantic coasts and Martinique Island, to the north.

Point du Cap

Back on the main highway, continue on to St. Lucia's northernmost tip, Pointe du Cap, and the elegant residential area known as **Cap Estate.** It's interesting to cruise slowly past the beautiful homes built among the picturesque rolling hills. Some of the island's most exclusive resorts are here (LeSport and Club St. Lucia Resort) along with the St. Lucia Golf and Country Club.

Cap Estate is also home to the **Derek Walcott Theatre** (☎ 758-450-0551), an intimate open-air amphitheater adjacent to an exquisite 18th-century Colonial manor that is now the **Great House Restaurant** (☎ 758-450-0450). The theater hosts dance, music, and dramatic productions throughout the year. Tickets are available from the Department of Culture in Castries, ☎ 758-468-5101, and Sunshine Bookstore at Gablewoods, ☎ 758-452-3222.

Art lovers will want to stop at the studio and gallery of internationally known artist, **Llewelyn Xavier**. It's housed in a white building on your left just past the second traffic circle, as you drive in from the south (☎ 758-450-9155). The gallery also shows a selection of works by other St. Lucian artists, including Derek Walcott (his Nobel Prize is for literature, but he is a man of many talents) and Roy Lawaetz.

When you've finished your tour of Cap Estate, you can tackle the rugged roads that lead off into the wild hills of Pointe du Cap and around the northern tip to to **Pointe Hardy** on the east coast. You will have the whole place to yourself, since the dry, scrubby landscape doesn't draw

many visitors. Adventurous hikers will appreciate the unmarked trails blazed by fishermen who have walked the hilly coast many times over the years. If you don't want to go it alone, some of the resorts in Cap Estate organize hiking tours for guests, and you may be able to join one (check with Le Sport, ☎ 758-450-8551, or Club St. Lucia, ☎ 758-450-8551). Also, the **Forest and Lands Department** (☎ 758-450-2231) can suggest a guide.

■ The Southern Loop

St. Lucia's main highway runs south from Castries, down the western coast, around the southern tip, and up the eastern coast to the village of Dennery. At Dennery, about mid-island on the Atlantic side, the main road turns inland, creating a shortcut back to the west coast. You can drive the entire southern end of the island in one day, even if you stop often to see the sites.

Highlights

- **Marigot Bay**
- The twin peaks of the **Piton Mountains**
- **Diamond Falls** and the **Botanical Gardens**
- **Sulfur Springs** and the drive-in volcano crater
- Panoramic views from the lighthouse at **Cap Moule à Chique**
- **Mamiku Botanical Gardens**

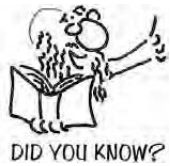
The loop road from Castries through the southern section of the island passes through some of the most attractive scenery in the eastern Caribbean. Paved, but narrow and steep, the main highway winds up into forested mountains and dips into river valleys thick with banana trees.

If you like military history and panoramic views, stop at **La Toc Battery**, a restored fort from the island's Colonial period. You can tour the grounds daily during the winter months from 9am to 3pm, and by appointment from May through November (☎ 758-451-6300). Give special attention to the 19th-century high-tech cannons, which were the first to use a rifle-style barrel, and their advantageous positioning toward Castries' harbor.

Marigot Bay

Continuing south on the west-coast highway, watch for signs marking the right turn onto the steep road down to Marigot Bay, a gorgeous natural harbor and among the most outstanding anchorages in all the Caribbean. When you see the secluded cove, you will understand why pirates consid-

ered it an ideal hideout. Boats passing by in open water often miss the narrow opening that leads to the bay, which is tucked deep into the mountainous coast. Several guesthouses and inns are set among the trees on both sides of the bay, and a palm-shaded beach stretchs out at the foot of the green hills. Transportation from one side of the harbor to the other and from the marina jetty to the beach is provided by a water taxi.



The 1967 movie Doctor Doolittle*, starring Rex Harrison, was filmed at Marigot Bay.* ***Doolittle's*** *waterside restaurant and bar is the perfect place for sunset happy hour;* ☎ *758-451-4974.*

Just inland from Marigot Bay you'll see the island's only rum factory. It is owned by St. Lucia Distillers Group of Companies, which produces a line of specialty rums sold under 15 labels, including Bounty Rum. You can visit the modernized factory by signing up for the *Rhythm of Rum* tour offered by **Sunlink Tours** (about EC$110/US$40, ☎ 758-452-8929 or 758-452-9022), which includes a history lesson on the importance of rum to St. Lucia specifically and the Caribbean in general. In addition to touring the distillery, you'll see a short video and enjoy an all-you-care-to-sip tasting, followed by free time in the gift shop.

East of the distillery, a string of handsome waterfalls cascades down the **Roseau River**. You'll need a guide to find them, since they are hidden in a rugged area, but they're worth the hike. Find a local guide by asking around as you drive through the tiny settlements of Roseau and Anse La Raye, or call the Forestry Department, ☎ 758-450-2078 or 758-450-2231 (they have an office on the waterfront in Castries).

As you travel south toward Soufrière, take the time to drive slowly along the narrow streets in the little fishing village of **Anse La Raye** to see the colorful wooden houses and observe the women washing clothes and bathing kids in the river. Residents will return your smiles and waves, and offer to help you find the road to Soufrière, because surely you are lost and do not intend to be in their ordinary little village.

Look for a metal bridge spanning the Anse La Raye River, which empties into the bay at the southern end of the village. Just before you cross the bridge, you'll see a sign marking the road to **La Sikwi**, a restored sugar mill that was built around 1860 on the 400-acre **Invergoll Estate**. The plantation now grows bananas and cocoa, and you can arrange a tour of the pastoral grounds, the mill, and nearby waterfalls by contacting Carib Touring, ☎ 758-452-1141, or Jungle Tours, ☎ 758-450-0434. Both companies offer several types of excursions with costs in the range of EC$100/US$37.

Every week, Anse La Raye hosts a **Friday Night Fish Fry**, an event that is gaining popularity, but still doesn't match the fervor of jump-up in Gros

Islet. The fish are fresh-caught and deliciously prepared, often by the fisherman who caught them. Local bands provide music in the park directly across from the food vendors on the small beach. Since this event starts up around eight in the evening, it's quite possible to have dinner here and move on to Gros Islet, where the party doesn't start winding down until two or three on Saturday morning.

The road south of Anse La Raye continues through the community of **Canaries,** which is also tucked into a river-fed bay, to **Anse La Liberté**, the only campground on the island. Established by the St. Lucia National Trust, the compound includes four miles of hiking trails and a pleasant beach with watersports equipment. For information and camping reservations contact the National Trust, ☎ 758-452-5005; www.slunatrust-.org/all.

Soon after leaving Anse La Liberté, the road heads up into the fringes of the rainforest, then breaks out with breathtaking views of the twin **Pitons** as you drive down to **Soufrière**, the second-most important town on St. Lucia. If the shocks on your car can take a beating, it's worth making a quick detour to see **Anse Chastanet**. Look for a sign pointing the way up an incredibly rough road to the bay and resort, which share the same name. The beach here is quite spectacular, and the close-in reef is protected as a national marine park and a favorite with snorkelers and divers.

Soufrière

Soufrière is older and, in many ways, more interesting than the capital. It was founded by the French in 1746 and named for the sulfurous springs that flow in the collapsed volcanic crater located a couple of miles away. In its prime, the city was an important port that bustled with businesses engaged in the export of coffee and cocoa. When the market for these products dwindled, Soufrière rapidly declined as well. Today, the village shows obvious signs of age and poverty, but improvements are being made, especially around the waterfront.

*The **Soufrière Tourist Office** (☎ 758-459-7419) is on Maurice Mason Street across from the boat docks, near the police station. Ask about joining a group led by a member of the Guide Corps for a walking tour of the town. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 8am to 4pm, and Saturday, 8am to noon.*

Despite its lack of luster, Soufrière has an infectious spirit that makes it irresistible, especially on Saturday mornings, when the local market takes over the shaded walkway along the waterfront. A block inland,

between Bridge and Church Streets off Sir Arthur Lewis Street (named for one of the island's two Nobel prize winners), **Eizabeth Square** is the town's green centerpiece. Peek into the old stone **Lady of Assumption Church** overlooking the east side of the square. It was built in 1953, but stands on ground that housed older churches, which were destroyed by hurricanes, earthquakes, and fires. With so many disasters over the years, it's surprising that much is left of the original town, but you will see examples of French Colonial architecture around the square and along the waterfront.

Follow Sir Arthur Lewis Street, on the south side of Elizabeth Square, about a mile inland to the **Soufrière Estate**. The plantation won a preservation award from American Express and is one of the historic sites targeted by the Nature Heritage Tourism Campaign, which seeks to increase tourism through environmental protection. The site encompasses the **Diamond Botanical Gardens** (☎ 758-459-7565), a 30-foot **waterfall**, and thermal **mineral baths**.

King Louis XIV presented the property to Philippe Devaux in 1713 as part of his land-grant program. The estate was developed into a thriving sugar plantation, and parts of it are still owned by the original family. You can visit the Botanical Gardens Monday through Saturday, 10am to 5pm and Sunday from 10am to 3pm. Tickets are EC$10/US$3.75.

A marked path leads through the shaded garden planted with flowering bird-of-paradise, hibiscus, and ginger lily. At the end of the trail, you come to a waterfall pouring from a fissure into a rocky pool. The cascade starts high up the cliff and comes down the rock face in six stages. Sulfur from underground springs colors the water shades of bright green, blue, and purple, and stains the rocks a deep, rusty orange.

In 1784, King Louis XVI ordered the construction of baths over the estate's sulfur-laden springs so that his troops could benefit from the curative powers of the water. The springs emerge from the ground at 106°F, with a mineral analysis similar to the famous healing baths at Aix-les-Bains, France. Today, you can soak in the warm mineral baths that have been built next to the waterfall among the ruins of the original French structures. Admission to the communal pool is EC$8/US$3, and a private soaking costs EC$11/US$5.

Take the time to drive a bit farther east, toward the village of Fond St. Jacques, until you come to the lush gardens that surround the **Toraille Waterfall**. It plunges 50 feet over a cliff and tumbles into a natural pool. Nearby, a trail creeps through thick trees and flowering bushes that house colorful birds and scampering lizards. A changing room is available, so you can slip into a swimsuit and stand under the falls for an energizing massage. Tour groups show up midday, so come early or late if you prefer not to share paradise. The grounds are open daily, 9am to 5pm, EC$8/US$3.

To continue your tour along the southern loop road, go back to the west-coast highway and turn south toward Choiseul. With the Piton Mountains still ahead, watch for signs directing you east to the **Morne Coubaril Estate**, a magnificent plantation with fantastic views of the sea and the Pitons. The 250-acre plantation was opened to the public in 1995 as a cultural and historical center. A 90-minute tour included in the EC$15/US$5.62 entrance fee will give you a good idea of St. Lucia's agricultural past. You will travel down the old mule path to ruins of the 18th-century sugar mill and a recreated village where slaves once lived. The estate (located across the highway from the road leading down to the Jalousie Hilton Resort) is open daily, 9am to 4:30pm, ☎ 459-7340.

Sulfur Springs

Just east of the Morne Coubaril Estate, the over-hyped Sulfur Springs at the drive-in volcano on Mount Soufrière are a must-see, simply because they're there. The walls of the volcano disintegrated long ago, so don't expect to drive into an actual crater. You park on the hillside, quite close to all the action, then walk among the dormant but bubbling gaseous pits that smell and look like a scene from hell. Guides will take you on a tour of the lunar-like landscape, but be sure to stay on designated paths and overlooks. The ground is soft, and you don't want to risk stepping off into the hissing, boiling mud.

The springs are open daily, 9am to 5pm, EC$5.50/US$2. Your admission fee includes a guided tour, but expect to be approached by islanders who offer their individual services. Their embellished stories are entertaining, but don't feel pressured into hiring them. If you do want a private tour, agree on a price before you set out, and don't be surprised when they ask for an additional tip.

If you've ever wondered where your Hershey's chocolate bar got its start, visit the working cocoa plantation on the **Fond Doux Estate,** about a mile east of the Sulfur Springs**.** Guides will show you around the property that was established more than 250 years ago on land granted to French settlers. You'll see how cocoa pods are harvested, aged in banana leaves to extract the juices, and "danced" smooth enough to peel. A path leads past cocoa trees and gardens to the remains of the original greathouse and cells that held prisoners during a 1795 Battle of Rabot, a rebellion of French freedom fighters against the British military. A restaurant set among stone ruins serves Créole specialties and delicious desserts, and a gift shop sells local artwork and, of course, cocoa sticks. The estate is open daily, 9am to 5pm. Admission is EC$10/US$3.75; ☎ 758-759-7545.

The Pitons

Back on the Soufrière-Vieux Fort highway, you will have a dazzling view of the Pitons as you drive south. These twin volcanic peaks are outstand-

ing because of the way they soar straight out of the Caribbean. It's possible to hike **Gros Piton**, the shorter but wider mountain, but you must have permission from the Forestry Department (☎ 758-450-2078 or 758-450-2231) and be accompanied by an authorized guide. It's a tough hike up steep ascents and through thick vegetation, so only experienced hikers in good condition should consider it.

On your way to Vieux Fort, stop in the pleasant fishing village of **Choiseul** (named for a duke who served under King Louis XV) to visit the **Art & Craft Center**. You can wander around the workshop to watch the artisans making pottery, baskets, and wood carvings. The store offers good prices and there's a large selection of traditional Caribbean handicrafts. Monday through Saturday, 9am to 5pm; ☎ 758-459-3226.

The next fishing village to the south, **Laborie**, is a giant step back to the past. Walk around the waterfront to see the colorful boats and chat with the friendly fishermen. Then, buy some fresh bread and drinks and hike (or drive the rocky, potholed road) up **Morne Le Blanc** for a picnic. You'll have majestic views of Vieux Fort and the island's southern plains from the shaded rest area at the summit.

Cap Moule à Chique

Vieux Fort, at the southern tip of the island, sits on a flat plain that extends out into the water where the clear-turquoise Caribbean meets the deep-blue Atlantic. It's a large port city and site of Hewanorra International Airport. Otherwise, its charm lies in the fact that it is out of the line of most tourist traffic. You'll see some quaint wooden buildings in town, and a fleet of fishing boats anchored in the bay, but the real attraction is the **lighthouse** view from Moule à Chique. After a moderate hike to the top of the 730-foot hill, you'll be able to see the Maria Islands to the east, all of St. Lucia's interior mountains to the north, and, on a clear day, St. Vincent 20 miles to the south.

Soon after you leave Vieux Fort, driving north up the east coast, you'll come to **Mankote Mangrove Swamp**, which serves as a source of nutrients for the fish nursery protected by a living reef in **Savannes Bay**. The shallow bay is an active fishing area and excellent breeding ground for conch and other sea creatures. From the observation tower you'll have great views of the bay and mangrove. If you want to tour Mankote Mangrove or visit the nature reserves on the offshore Maria Islands or Frégate Islands, you must arrange a guided tour through the St. Lucia National Trust, ☎ 758-452-5005.

The beach at **Anse de Sables** is popular with windsurfers because of the steady wind and rolling surf. Swimmers enjoy the relatively uncrowded sand, but there's little shade. A few snack bars serve drinks and sandwiches. **The Maria Island Interpretive Center** is on the beach, across

from the islands themselves. You can visit the center for an overview of the nature reserve and book a guided tour out to the islands. Admission is free, and the small museum is open Monday through Friday, 9am to 4pm; ☎ 758-454-5014.

Maria Islands are two tiny uninhabited scrapes of land, Maria Major and Maria Minor, floating in the Atlantic about a half-mile off St. Lucia's far southeast coast. They are the protected home of nesting seabirds and two rare reptiles, the extremely scarce and harmless *kouwés* snake and the colorful *zandoli te* lizard (or Maria Islands ground lizard). You won't be allowed to visit during the nesting season from May 15 to July 31. At other times, you can go by boat with a guide from the National Trust and spend the day hiking through the scrubby forest, swimming from the beach on Maria Major, and exploring the underwater coral reefs. Day-trips cost EC$94/US$35 for a private guide and EC$81/US$30 per person for group tours.

The **zandoli tè** *ground lizard lives only on the two Maria Islands and nearby Preslin Island. Males have a bright blue tail and yellow belly. Females are brown with dark stripes. The* **kouwés** *snake lives only on Maria Major. It is green and brown and grows up to three feet long.*

Another nature reserve is located on the **Frégate Islands**. These two rocky chunks of land are named Frégate Major and Frégate Minor for the thieving, fork-tailed, jet-black frigate birds that live there. Boa constrictors (light brown and locally known as *tête chien*) and fer-de-lance (tan with orange, diamond-shaped markings) snakes live in the tall grass on the islands, but they are quite shy and rarely seen. You can't visit the Frégates themselves, but the National Trust has an interpretive center on St. Lucia's east coast, directly across from the close-in islands. You must be accompanied by a guide on the mile-long walking trail, which loops through lush greenery past a waterfall and mangrove swamp. An observation point provides an excellent view of the islands. Call the National Trust in advance, ☎ 758-452-5005, to arrange admittance to the center. The entrance fee of EC$55/US$20 includes a guided walking tour.

The Frégates are off the east-coast fishing village of **Praslin**, which is between the main towns of **Micoud** and **Dennery.** The road is good, but unexceptional for the most part. However, you'll want to take the time to tour the windward side of the island to see the beautiful countryside carpeted by banana plantations and stop for views of the stunning Atlantic coast.

Praslin Bay has a pretty cliff-sheltered beach. Get there by parking along the east-coast road and walking down one of the steep paths to the

long stretch of shaded sand. Pint-sized Praslin Island is just off shore, and you can go out there with a guide from the National Trust for about EC$30/US$11.25 per person; call ☎ 758-452-5005. During the week, you'll probably have the whole place to yourself, but on weekends, local families picnic on the beach and swim in the gentle surf. There are no facilities, but vendors sell snacks and drinks on weekends and holidays.

Mamiku Gardens

On the highway south of Praslin, you'll see signs for Mamiku Gardens, an 18th-century estate that has been restored and is now open to visitors. You can walk along flagstone paths through 12 acres of woodlands to manicured areas with names such as Secret Garden and Mystic Garden. There are benches made of tree branches where you can sit and look out on fabulous views of the Atlantic and the Frégate Islands. The Shingleton-Smith family has owned the property since 1906, but the main estate house was built in 1796 by Baron de Micoud, a French aristocrat and former governor of St. Lucia. Brigand's Bar and Garden Gate gift shop now occupy the renovated house. Mamiku Gardens are open daily, 9am to 5pm; ☎ 758-455-3729, www.mamiku.com.

The handsome town of **Dennery** is on a protected bay north of Praslin. Stop here to admire the colorful, hand-crafted, and creatively named fishing boats. If you have time, follow the road at the south end of town inland along the Dennery River until you run out of pavement for some interesting scenery. As far as sightseeing in the town, only St. Peter's Catholic Church, overlooking the seaside, is of much interest. It was built at the end of the 18th century and is one of the oldest churches on St. Lucia. On Saturday nights, residents get together for a community fish fry, and visitors are welcome to drop by for a delicious and inexpensive dinner. Don't expect a big street party, like the one in Gros Islet on Fridays. This is a much more laid-back event.

The main highway out of Dennery turns inland and snakes its way over the steep **Barre de l'Isle Ridge** that runs through the center of the island. You'll have good views of the interior forest reserves and the Roseau Valley as you travel back to the west coast. Plan to return to this area when you have time to hike the trails and climb to the top of 1,437-foot **Morne La Combe**.

See Adventures On Foot*, page 171, for information on hiking forest and northeast-coast trails.*

Organized Tours

If you want to see the island with someone who knows it well, consider taking a half-day or full-day tour with an enthusiastic and informative guide. St. Lucia's strict conservation policies prohibit unaccompanied exploration of some sites, but a trained guide can get you into almost any area.

The **St. Lucia National Trust** schedules group tours to sites under their management, such as the Morne Fortuné Historic Area, Pigeon Island National Park, and remote Pointe Hardy. Tours cost around EC$50/US$18.73 to EC$90/US$33.71 plus transportation to the site by bus, which may add EC$10/US$3.75 to EC$25/US$10. During the summer, the Trust sponsors **Heritage Sunday**, which spotlights the island's traditional songs, dances, and foods, and is held at a historical site. Locations, times, and prices vary, so call the office in advance for information; ☎ 758-452-5005.

Your entrance fee (EC$25/US$10) to the trails in the protected forest preserves includes the services of a mandatory guide from the **Forestry Department**. However, don't show up unannounced at the trail head and expect the ranger station to have a guide on hand. Call ahead.

Several agencies run organized tours covering either the entire island or specific remote locations. You'll see the wildly decorated Jeeps and four-wheel-drive trucks traveling over the main roads with small groups of obviously happy tourists. Half-day tours run about EC$100/US$37 per person, while full-day excursions range from EC$200/US$75 to EC$300/US$112 per person and usually include lunch. Some of the most popular day-trips are hikes through the rainforest and boat rides to the famous Pitons on the less-populated southern end of the island.

Your hotel can suggest tours and operators, but you may want to call around or check web sites to get an idea of what's available. Don't forget about tours by helicopter, boat, or on horseback. They aren't for everyone, but you'll get a different perspective of the island, if you sign up for one.

■ Tour Guides & Operators

The Forestry Department manages trails in the national forests and reserves. Your entrance fee includes the services of a guide, but call in advance to insure that someone will be available, ☎ 758-450-2078 or 758-450-2231, www.slumaffe.org (click on "Forestry Resource Department" then "Rainforest Trails").

The St. Lucia National Trust manages conservation sites throughout the island and offers a variety of tours and events, ☎ 758-452-5005, www.slunatrust.org/tours.htm.

Heritage Tours is part of the Heritage Tourism Association of St. Lucia, which encourages visits to the island's more remote areas. They also run turtle watches between March and July, when leatherback turtles come ashore at night to lay eggs in the sand on northeast-coast beaches. ☎ 758-451-6220, www.heritagetoursstlucia.com.

Spice Travel is a friendly, family-owned company offering a collection of tours to popular and off-the-beaten-track sites throughout the island, ☎ 800-GOSPICE or 758-452-0865, www.casalucia.com/spice1.htm.

Jungle Tours offers three rainforest adventures rated for beginning, intermediate, or advanced hikers. In addition, there are tours to the beach, waterfalls, and special outings for cruise-ship passengers with time restrictions. All include transportation in an open Land Rover, and most feature a buffet lunch, ☎ 758-450-0434, www.jungletoursstlucia.com.

Courtesy Taxi Cooperative has cars, vans, and buses to take individuals and groups on an array of sightseeing excursions. Taxi drivers attend a government-sponsored training course to learn more about the island and how to show it off to visitors. The Courtesy Coop has scheduled tours, but you may request a driver to take you anywhere you want to go, ☎ 758-459-0302, www.stluciatravel.com.lc/courtesy.htm.

Paradise Tours has scheduled around-the-island tours, Jeep tours, rainforest hikes, and trips to nearby islands. Their office is located near the airport in Vieux Fort, ☎ 758-454-9876, www.slucia.com/paradise.

Trim Tours is owned and operated by Tom Trim, a personable St. Lucian who works with the National Trust to provide guided tours of the Maria Islands Preserve, ☎ 758-452-2502, www.st-lucia.org.

Island Adventures

On Water

St. Lucia's west coast has long stretches of soft sand, natural harbors, and gentle Caribbean waves. The rugged east coast offers spectacular views from cliffs that shelter picturesque coves and fantastic Atlantic surf suitable for riding. Several tour operators run popular fishing, snorkeling, diving, and boating excursions to sites that cannot be reached by land.

■ Best Beaches

St. Lucia's best beaches are along the western coast where warm Caribbean waters and soft sand provide perfect conditions for swimming and

sunning. On the northern end, around Castries and the big resorts, you'll find white or golden sand. To the south, where there are numerous isolated coves at the foot of steep mountains, you find black volcanic sand. The wilder Atlantic coast has marvelous isolated beaches with heavy surf that makes them too dangerous for swimming, but perfect for getting away from the main tourist areas. Water off the southern tip has become popular with board, wind, and kite surfers.

All beaches on St. Lucia are public. Total nudity and topless sunning are illegal, and residents are offended by tourists who walk around town or into shops wearing swimsuits.

West Coast

Smuggler's Cove is on the far north end of the island in an elite residential area called Cap Estate. You must park on the highway just north of LeSport Resort and take steps down a steep incline to the sand-lined bay . While the beach is public, all equipment and refreshments are for guests of the all-inclusive LeSport Resort, so you may feel like an unwanted misfit. Get over it, and enjoy the cliff-sheltered white sand, calm sea, and good snorkeling.

Take the well-maintained John Compton Highway north out of Castries, connect with the Gros Islet Highway, and continue north past George F.L. Charles Airport. A left turn to the west and another left turn onto Peninsular Road will bring you parallel to **Vigie Beach**. The beach may be littered, but the sand is shaded and the water is calm. Follow the road uphill to the far western tip, where you will see some government buildings (built by the military in the late 1800s) and a lighthouse dating from 1914. You can't get into the lighthouse without permission from the St. Lucia National Trust, but the views from here are excellent. In fact the peninsula has been used as a signal station since 1722 (in French, *vigie* means "lookout"). On a clear day you may be able to spot the Pitons and Mount Gimie, the island's tallest peak.

Vigie Beach is at the southern end of popular **Choc Bay**, located between Castries and Gros Islet. While its golden sand is shaded by palms, it's often shunned by tourists because it sits near the runway at George Charles Airport, and the beach is often littered. However, locals gather here, and families come on weekends to swim in the calm water.

Reduit Beach (say *red-wee*) forms the eastern arm of sheltered Rodney Bay lagoon. It's a spectacular beach with soft, deep, beige sand and tranquil water that draws tourists from the ultra-chic St. Lucian and Royal St. Lucian resorts. You can get a drink at the resorts' waterside bars or rent equipment from their sports centers. Parasailing and windsurfing

instruction is available from a couple of beach vendors. The entrance into Rodney Bay is cut through the north end of the beach, separating it from the town of Gros Islet.

Pigeon Island National Park has a pleasant sand beach near the pier, as well as several rocky waterfront areas for relaxing and enjoying the views. You'll have to pay an entrance fee to get into the park, so plan to visit this beach after touring the grounds or hiking along the trails.

La Toc Bay, just south of Castries, is the crescent-shaped home of Sandals St. Lucia Resort. The beach is lovely, but strong currents sometimes make swimming a chore.

Marigot Bay, which is simply stunning, is secluded, surrounded by tall green hills, and shaded by palm trees. While it's a popular anchorage for yachts, the cove is partially divided by a coral bar and large enough to accommodate deserted beaches and well-camouflaged facilities. A little water taxi provides rides from one side of the bay to the other, and you can get drinks and lunch at one of the restaurants or bars. British developer Doubloon International recently bought property on the bay, and plans to build a new US$18-million marina and luxury resort, which will be named Discovery at Marigot Bay. You may see construction underway during your visit.

Anse La Raye is a shady beach that's popular with village residents. Bring a picnic lunch and snorkeling equipment, because there are no facilities on the beach. The water is clear and ideal for snorkeling. The community throws a fish fry on Friday nights, and all visitors are welcome.

Anse Couchon's magnificent silver-sand beach is most easily reached by boat, and you can ask around in Anse La Raye for the name of a fisherman who will take you there for a reasonable fee. You can also get to the cove by walking down the steep stairs from Ti Kaye Resort. Many of the scuba outfitters conduct dive and snorkeling trips to the bay because of the many colorful tropical fish that live below the crystal-clear water.

Anse Chastanet (pronounce this nasally as *ahns-SHAS-tin-ay*) isn't for everyone, and that's what makes it so incredibly fabulous for some. From its gritty black-sand beach you have a breathtaking view of the Pitons. A sudden steep drop-off close to shore leads to an underwater world that's protected as a marine reserve, so snorkeling and diving are excellent directly from the beach. Children and weak swimmers may feel uncomfortable here, but anyone who enjoys the ocean and its remarkable creatures will be captivated by the raw beauty. The Anse Chastanet resort is here, along with Scuba St. Lucia Dive Center, so you can have meals, rent equipment, and schedule boat excursions right on the beach. Tall palms and thatched-roof huts provide shade. The road down to the bay is brutally rugged, but worth it.

Trou au Diable is just around Grand Caille Point from Anse Chastanet, and reached by the same rutty road. Snorkeling is especially good here. The black-sand beach in front of Hummingbird Resort and the Still Plantation Resort offers calm water and breathtaking views of the Pitons. Both resorts have beachcomber bars and good restaurants.

Anse des Pitons is a crescent-shaped bay set between Petit Piton and Gros Piton, south of Soufrière. Glamourous Jalousie Hilton Resort and Spa is here, and you can rent sports equipment or arrange scuba excursions through Frogs Dive Center. The Bang Restaurant and Bar is located nearby for meals and drinks. The current is sometimes strong at Anse des Pitons, but snorkeling and diving are excellent below both the Piton mountains.

East Coast

Anse de Sables, in the eastern curve of the peninsula near Vieux Fort and Hewanorra Airport, is the hot spot for wave riders. Club Mistral Windsurfing Center (☎ 758-454-3418) rents equipment and gives lessons. The Reef Beach Café (same phone number) serves seafood and great drinks, and you can check your e-mail at their Internet stations.

Sandy Beach, between Club Mistral and Pointe Sable, is popular with locals on weekends, but you'll have the place pretty much to yourself on weekdays. Food and drink are available at The Reef Beach Café and Sandy Beach Club (☎ 758-454-7416).

Man Kòtè Beach is being upgraded by the National Trust and may be in prime condition by the time you visit. It's a small area next to the ecologically sensitive mangrove swamp, just north of Pointe Sable. There are better beaches, but this one is shaded and usually unoccupied.

Grande Anse is off a dirt road north of Dennery, and you'll need a four-wheel drive vehicle to get there unscathed. The journey's well worth it. Plans are underway to improve the roads and develop the area, and you may see changes by the time you visit. The beach is an extensive span of excellent shaded sand ringed by high cliffs. Brisk winds make the surf hazardous for swimming, so plan to picnic, sunbathe, and stand only knee-deep in the waves.

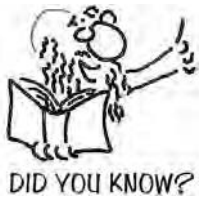
Leatherback turtles lay their eggs in the sand on secluded northeast-coast beaches from March through June. You can witness this spectacular ritual on Grande Anse Beach by joining an all-night watch sponsored by ***Heritage Tours****,* *☎ 758-451-6220, www.heritagetoursstlucia.com.*

Cas-en-Bas is a reef-protected bay on the far northeast coast with excellent windsurfing conditions and a beach bar. You get there by hiking (one hour) or four-wheel drive vehicle (45 minutes) along the potholed road from Gros Islet. The beach is quiet and shaded by palms, but the water can be dangerous. Undercurrents fool even the locals.

■ Boating

Take at least one around-the-island boat tour while you're on St. Lucia. Better yet, charter your own craft and take your time exploring each area. Some of the sights, such as the volcanic Piton mountains, simply cannot be fully appreciated from land. Others, such as the isolated bay at Anse Cochon, cannot easily be reached by land.

Several companies run excellent day-trips that sail down the calm west. Most stop for land tours at places such as Diamond Falls and the drive-in volcano, then anchor offshore for swimming and snorkeling. The price usually includes transportation from your hotel, drinks, snacks, and entertainment. At the marinas in Marigot Bay and Rodney Bay, you can hire your own boat – any size and type, with or without a crew – for day-trips or live-aboard cruises to nearby islands.



*Rodney Bay is the finish point for the annual **Atlantic Rally for Cruisers** (ARC), the largest trans-ocean sailing event in the world. The rally begins each November 22nd in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, in the Canary Islands off the southern coast of Spain. Around December 5th, the first of more than 150 entrants begin arriving on St. Lucia. They're greeted with a festive celebration and a full schedule of special events to mark the end of their 2,700-mile trip. If you want to join the fun, contact Rodney Bay Marina, ☎ 758-452-0324, www.rodneybaymarina.com or Carib Travel, ☎ 758-452-2151, www.caribtravelltd.com.*

Sightseeing & Party Boats

Half-day sightseeing tours average EC$125/US$40, full-day trips with lunch and snorkeling run about EC$200/US$75, and sunset party cruises with drinks cost around EC$150/US$55.

Endless Summer runs catamaran cruises, including a champagne sunset cruise; ☎ 758-450-8651, www.skyviews.com/stlucia/endlesssummer.

Brig *Unicorn* conducts tours on a 140-foot replica of a 19th-century schooner that was used in the filming of the movie *Roots;* ☎ 758-452-6811.

***Vigie*,** a 56-foot twin-engine cruiser, departs from Rodney Bay Marina at 9am heading toward Soufrière and returns around 5pm with stops for sightseeing tours, lunch at the Still Restaurant, and snorkeling at Anse Cochon; ☎ 758-452-9423.

Mango Tango and *Tango Too* are part of the **Just Tango** catamaran fleet. They both sail from Rodney Bay on snorkeling and sightseeing tours along the west coast; ☎ 758-452-0459 or 758-452-9842.

Charters

Bare-boat and fully crewed charters are a popular way to cruise the West Indies. Most charter outfitters are located at Rodney Bay Marina or Marigot Bay Marina, fully equipped anchorages with shops, maintenance facilities, grocery stores, and restaurants. From St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines are only a one-day sail to the south, and Martinique is 30 miles to the north. Prices and boats vary widely, so check with a few operators for specific information.

Yacht ***Annie T***, a 51-foot Jeanneau Sun Odyssey sailing sloop, is available for bare-boat or crewed charters from St. Lucia to neighboring islands; ☎ 758-450-1411, www.yachtanniet.com.

Leisure, a 50-foot luxury yacht, is available for charter. Captain Lawrence also schedules day-trips, wedding parties, and fishing excursions; ☎ 758-452-4484, www.stluciatravel.com.lc/leisure.htm.

Oasis Marigot Ship'N Shore Vacations arranges everything for your vacation, from land accommodations and flight reservations, to boat rental. The web site has great photos and information, ☎ 800-263-4202, www.oasismarigot.com.

***Riposte*,** 47-foot sailing yacht, is available for day sails and week-long trips. Contact Skipper Tom Barrett for rates and information; ☎ 01243-641721 (phone/fax in the UK) or 758-484-3880 (on St. Lucia), www.nbi.net/stlucia/riposte/charter.html.

Destination St. Lucia (DSL) has a fleet of 15 monohull and catamaran sailboats that sleep up to 10 passengers. Owners Ulrich and Sandra Meixner are Austrian transplants who love sailing the Caribbean seas. ☎ 758-452-8531, fax 758-452-0183, www.dsl-yachting.com; or book through Tradewind Tours, ☎ 800-860-8013 (US) or 0800-917-4078 (UK), www.tradewindtours.com/tradewind/sailing.

Moorings has a bareboat rental fleet of 38- to 50-foot *Beneteaus*, and a crewed fleet of 50- to 60-foot yachts. Their St. Lucia operation is based in Marigot Bay; ☎ 800-535-7289 or 758-451-4357.

You can see whales and dolphins up close in their natural habitat on a boat trip leaving from Vigie Cove. Bottle-nosed dolphins and sperm, pilot, and humpback whales swim in the warm Caribbean Sea near St. Lucia year-round. Chris and David Hackshaw take watch groups out on Blue Boy, *a 32-foot, twin-engine-powered boat. The four-hour tour costs EC$135 / US$50 per person through* ***Hackshaws Boat Charters and Sportfishing****, ☎ 758-453-0553, www.worldwidefishing.com / stlucia / b883.*

■ Scuba Diving

Veteran divers say St. Lucia's underwater world equals or surpasses other Caribbean sites, and new environmental regulations insure that the pristine coral reefs and abundant sea life thrive and remain as undisturbed as possible.

The soaring mountains that captivate visitors on land continue below the sea and provide shelter for a tremendous variety of creatures and plants. One of the most popular dives in the West Indies is off the beach at **Anse Chastanet,** which is part of the Soufrière Marine Management Area, where an underwater plateau starts near shore. This shallow dive, from five to 25 feet deep, is great for novice divers and snorkelers. Brightly colored sponges, soft corals, and large brain corals are found here along with goatfish, parrotfish, chromis and wrasse. Frogfish live in a cave at the base of the reef. Night divers have reported sighting a Loch Ness-like monster in the area, and locals joke about *The Thing* favoring Anse Chastanet as a vacation spot.

As you dive deeper, the reef drops quickly from 20 to 140 feet in a solid wall of mixed corals surrounded by schools of fish, crabs, lobsters and eels. At around 100 feet, layers of porcelain-like plate coral are stacked one on top of another. The massive coral reef continues all the way to the bay at Soufrière, in water that habitually offers 80 to 100 feet of visibility.

FAIRY LAND

Marine photographers often capture shots of Fairy Land, a current-cleaned coral plateau off Anse Chastanet Point. Because of the swift current here, you must be an experienced diver accompanied by a knowledgeable dive master.

Other favored areas include waters below **Petit Piton,** where there are incredible clusters of sponge and coral. This is the location of **Super-**

man's Flight, a wall that drops gently to 1,600 feet and was featured in the movie *Superman II*. The strong current clears debris and provides good visibility.

Nearby, around the base of **Gros Piton**, five-finger coral grows solidly from a depth of 15' to 50' in a site known as **Coral Gardens**. Rare sargassum-trigger fish live at greater depths. The slope here continues for hundreds of feet, so divers must monitor their gauges to avoid going too deep.

An excellent drift dive is along the wall off **Anse La Raye**. Brightly colored fire coral is found at shallow depths, and huge boulders cluster on a slope below the wall. Turtles are often spotted in this area. Wreck divers enjoy exploring ***Lesleen M***, a 165-foot freighter that was deliberately sunk at Anse La Raye in 1986 to create an artificial reef. Soft corals, sponges and hydroids harbor juvenile fish at depths of 30' to 65'. The freighter sits on an even keel in sand, and the hold and engine room are accessible.

The Japanese dredge, ***Daini Koyo Maru***, was sunk at the south end of Anse Cochon in 1996. Experienced divers can go through the interior of the 16,000-ton vessel, which is mostly intact. The 244-foot structure is on its side with coral growing on its bottom.

Perhaps the most talked about area is the **Key Hole Pinnacles**, which were voted one of the Ten Best Dive Sites by *Caribbean Travel and Life Magazine*. It's a remarkable site where four volcanic peaks rise sharply from the ocean floor to within a few feet of the surface. Black and orange gorgonia grow on the peaks providing shelter for filefish, trumpet fish, large grouper, and seahorses.

If you've never tried scuba diving, sign up for a resort course offered by most dive shops. After practicing with the equipment in shallow water or a swimming pool, an instructor will take you down 25' to 40' for a supervised tour of a reef or sunken boat swarming with marine life. This one-day course costs about EC$220/US$82.50, including equipment.

Some vacationers spend a week on St. Lucia earning their open-water certification card. This intensive training includes book work, water exercises, and a series of dives. Costs average EC$600/US$225 to EC$1,500/US$550, depending on what's included in the certification package.

Experienced divers must present a certification card when they sign in at the dive shop. Expect to pay about EC$106/US$40 for a one-tank dive and EC$160/US$60 for a two-tank dive, including equipment. Multi-day packages bring the per-tank dive price down to as little as EC$67.50/US$25. Off-season rates may be somewhat lower, but dive shops stay busy year-round and don't discount much.

If you intend to dive several days during your vacation, check into special packages offered by some of the resorts with on-site dive shops. Often, the

package price includes daily diving for the standard price of a room. Anse Chastanet Resort, Ti Kaye Village, Marigot Beach Club, Sandals, and Oasis Marigot are a few of the many hotels, villas, and all-inclusive resorts that offer package deals. Check the accommodation listings in this book for contact information.

Dive Operators

SCUBA St. Lucia is located on the beach next to the Anse Chastanet Resort; ☎ 758-459-7755, www.scubastlucia.com.

Frog's Diving has a center at Rodney Bay; ☎ 758-450-8831, www.frogs-diving.com.

Buddies Scuba is at the marina in Rodney Bay; ☎ 758-450-8406, www.superior.co.uk/buddies.

Dive Fair Helen is affiliated with Neal Watson Undersea Adventures, and has shops at Vigie Marina (adjacent to Pointe Seraphine Mall), Marigot Beach Club (on Marigot Bay), and Ti Kaye Village (at Anse Cochon); ☎ 758-451-7716, www.divefairhelen.com.

■ Snorkeling

Carry a pair of fins and a mask everywhere you go. You'll find plenty of opportunity to snorkel in pretty bays all along the coast of St. Lucia, especially on the western Caribbean side. The **Soufrière Marine Management Area** (SMMA) protects a large portion of the coast and adjacent sea on the southwest shore, including Anse Chastanet, Soufrière Bay, and Anse l'Ivrogne. Fishing and anchoring are restricted in this area, so reefs and marine life flourish.

Look for various brightly colored fish that live among the rocks and coral. You'll recognize the cherub faces of blue-green French angelfish, the stunning posterior of the yellowtail damselfish, the skinny pipefish, the long-nosed trumpet fish, and the chubby puffer fish. Pick up a fish identification guide at any of the dive shops for photos and descriptions of Caribbean sea life. You'll enjoy snorkeling and diving more, if you're able to identify some of the tropical species.

Surprisingly, there are relatively few dangerous critters in the sea, and humans are almost never attacked. Nevertheless, it doesn't hurt to be on the lookout for the less friendly among them. You know about sharks, of course. If you see their trademark dorsal fin coming your way, offer utmost respect (and never try to feed them). Most will swim by without any trouble. A grouchy sort may attack, though, and even nurse sharks deliver a nasty bite, so be prepared to move slowly out of their way.

Barracudas look fierce but are fairly shy. They're curious about humans and will hang around divers and snorkelers, but if you ignore them, they will soon swim away. Stingrays and electric rays can hurt you, but the sting or shock is usually mild, and most injuries occur when people disturb them from their naps. Moray eels scare most people, but they won't use their sharp teeth unless you stick your hand into their private residence. Even then, they may not want to hurt you, but they can't see well and tend to treat every moving object as food. Never try to coax them out of their holes with a treat.

You'll also see gorgeous living coral and other invertebrates in the St. Lucian waters. **Elkhorn** (tan), **finger** (pale yellow or white), and **brain** (looks just like its namesake) are the most common corals. One to look out for is the dingy-brown **fire coral**. You may mistake it for a dead coral, but you'll know immediately that you're mistaken if you touch it. The hair-like polyps that stick out of its branches deliver a powerful sting that results in painful welts on the skin. If you come in contact with fire coral, resist the impulse to rub your injury, which will spread the stingers. Treat the welts with cortisone cream as soon as possible.

You can snorkel off the beach in many places, and dive centers will take you out with a dive group, if there's room on the boat.

Day-cruises often include snorkeling, also. If you want to go out on your own, ask at your hotel about the current conditions at nearby bays. **Anse Chastanet** is probably the most popular snorkeling spot, but conditions are also good at **Marigot Beach Club** (a water taxi will take you across the bay to the beach) and **Reduit Beach**.

■ Fishing

St. Lucia has outstanding sportfishing, and even novices often catch a whopper. Guides know the waters around St. Lucia well and will take you to the optimum sites for sailfish, marlin, tuna, dorado, barracuda, and wahoo. Expect to pay about EC$2,000/US$750 for up to four people on a private full-day charter, and around EC$935/US$350 for up to four people on a private half-day charter. You can join an organized group for about EC$134/US$50 per half-day and EC$267/US$100 for a full-day excursion.

On June 29th of each year, the fishing communities of Vieux Fort, Dennery, Choiseul, and Anse La Raye celebrate **Fisherman's Fest**. The event is similar to the annual affair held in Boston, Massachusetts, and its roots go back to a tradition started during the 16th century in Italy. Sicilian fishermen were devoted to the Madonna del Soccorso (Our Lady of Help), and dedicated a day each year to thanking her for her protection and abundant gifts from the sea. On St. Lucia, the tradition continues with a joyous celebration and special activities that begin in the morning

with services at the Catholic churches. Priests then come out to the beaches to bless decorated boats and seaside sheds. Afternoon events include land games, boat races, and fishing competitions, and the day wraps up with live music, cookouts, and street dances.

DEEP-SEA CHARTER OPERATORS

Mako Water-Sports, ☎ 758-452-0412, www.worldwidefishing-.com/stlucia/b417/index.html

Capt. Mike's Sportfishing Cruises, ☎ 758-452-7044 or 758-450-1216, www.captmikes.com/

Hackshaws Boat Charters and Sportfishing, ☎ 758-453-0553, www.worldwidefishing.com/stlucia/b883

■ Surfing: Board, Wind & Kite

Most of the large resorts have beachside watersports centers where you can rent surfboards and windsurfers. Kitesurfing is the newest trend in watersports, and a new company has opened on the south end of the island to give instructions and rent equipment.

If you're a beginner, stick to the west coast beaches. The waves are calmer and the wind blows more gently than on the Atlantic side. Experienced surfers will want to meet the trade winds head-on at Anse de Sables, near Vieux Fort. Real daredevils tackle the wild waters, strong currents, and mighty winds farther up the east coast at Cas-en-Bas.

A new website, **StLuciaKiteBoarding.com**, gives terrific information on surfing in St. Lucia. The site owners, along with **The Reef Beach Café** (☎ 758-454-3418, www.slucia.com/reef/), host happy-hour gatherings and parties for vacationing surfers who hang out next door at **Club Mistral** and **Skyriders.** Nearby, the **Tornado Center** links up with the **Coastline Beach Bar** at **Juliette's Lodge** (☎ 758-454 5300, www.julietteslodge.com) to provide food and accommodations for surfers and riders.

If you plan to spend most of your vacation surfing, check out the package deals offered through the web sites for StLuciaKiteBoarding.com, Club Mistral (www.slucia.com/windsurf/index.html), and the Tornado Center (www.tornado-surf.com). You may get a few freebies as well as price breaks on lodging and equipment rental.

RENTALS

StLuciaKiteboarding.com, ☎ 758-454-3418, www.stluciakiteboarding.com

Club Mistral Windsurfing Center, ☎ 758-454-3327, www.slucia.com/windsurf/index.html

Skyriders Kitesurfing Center, ☎ 758-454-3327, www.slucia-.com/kitesurf/index.html

Tornado Center (boardsurfing, windsurfing, kitesurfing), ☎ 758-486-0545, www.tornado-surf.com

On Foot

■ Hiking

You can see a lot of St. Lucia as it passes by your car window, but the only way to fully experience the island's vast beauty is to explore it on foot. Even inexperienced hikers can manage the gentle paths through many areas, but seasoned hikers will want to tackle steeper climbs and longer distances over more remote terrain.

Two agencies manage most trails on St. Lucia. The **National Trust** oversees those in areas with historical, environmental, or cultural significance, such as Pigeon Island, Marigot Bay, and the Frégate and Maria Islands; the **Department of Forestry** controls the protected interior woodlands. Both agencies are committed to designing, constructing, and maintaining trails that provide optimum hiking experiences with the least impact on the environment.

Expect to pay an access fee of EC$25/US$10 to hike any trail managed by the Department of Forestry. The fee includes a department-trained guide, who will get you through difficult terrain and ecologically sensitive zones. Trails controlled by the National Trust are sometimes free of charge, but most require an entrance fee into the managed area, and some can be visited only on a guided tour.

*The Department of Forestry is part of the **Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries**, ☎ 758-452-2526; www.slumaffe.org.*

Arrange for hikes by contacting the Department of Forestry, ☎ 758-450-2078, or the National Trust, ☎ 758-452-5005. You can also join a scheduled hike coordinated by various tour operators listed under *Orga-*

nized Tours on page ###. Fees vary and most include transportation to the site and a choice of activities to suit diverse fitness and energy levels. Groups can be too noisy for bird watching, so if you want to spot a parrot, consider a private guide.

Short & Easy

The Union Nature Reserve, ☎ 758-450-2078 (Department of Forestry), is adjacent to the nursery of the Union Agricultural and Research Station, where baby trees are nurtured until they're ready to go out into the reforestation world. An **Interpretive Center** and **Mini Zoo** are located near the parking lot. Don't underestimate the zoo because of its size or outward appearance. Inside, you're guaranteed a sighting of the redneck pigeon (for which Pigeon Island was named), the Jacquot or St. Lucian parrot (the national bird), the indigenous agouti, boa constrictors, iguanas, and other elusive critters.

Spend a few minutes in the Interpretive Center to gather information about the forests, endangered species, and ecological concerns of the island. Rangers are usually available to answer questions and give tours, but you can get a good idea of the island's wildlife and vegetation by just looking over the displays. Next, head out to the two trails that begin behind the zoo.

The **Nature Trail** loops through about a mile of rugged terrain in what is known as a *dry forest* (as opposed to a rainforest). The path is a mile long and climbs to heights of 350 feet. If you amble along, watch for birds, and stop to read all the identification signs posted on many of the trees and plants, expect to spend about two hours on the trail.

The gentler **Garden Trail** is a pleasant half-mile walk along a gravel path with stops at a **medicinal herb** patch. Again, you don't need a guide, since pamphlets and placards identify the plants and their traditional use. However, the rangers tend the garden themselves and know a lot about herbal cures for everything from bug bites to the common cold. You may find their stories and experiences quite captivating.

Get to the Reserve by driving north from Castries on the Gros Islet Highway, past the turn off to George Charles Airport, to the signed Allan Bousquet Highway, which turns inland near the Sandals Resort on Choc Bay and leads to the village of Babonneau. The Union Nature Reserve is on the right, about 2.5km/1.5m from the Castries-Gros Islet Highway. The Interpretive Center and trails are open daily, 8am to 4:30pm.

Pigeon Island National Park, ☎ 758-452-5005, has several short, gentle paths connecting each area of the historic former island (a causeway now connects Pigeon Point to the mainland). The National Trust manages the park and the well-designed trails that lead you to significant sites,

such as **Fort Rodney** and **Signal Peak**. Pick up a map when you pay your entrance fee.

Start in the **museum** and **interpretive center** that are set up in restored British officers quarters, which are on your right as you enter the park. There you will get an overview of the park and its military importance. Afterwards, you have a choice of easy walks and moderate hikes through grasslands, gardens, and dry forest, along the coast, and up a couple of hills that offer fantastic views (Signal Hill is the tallest at 110m/365'). Pigeon Point National Park is open daily, 9am to 5pm. The entrance fee is EC$10/US$4 for adults and EC$2.67/US$1 for kids ages five to 12.

The Barre de l'Isle Trail is one of the best paths through the rainforest. If you aren't in shape for the rigorous climb up to the *barre* (ridge) that runs north-south through the center of the island, you can take an easy stroll along the loop path near the ranger hut at the beginning of the main trail. Look for a viewing point at the trail sign on the main highway that connects west-coast Castries with east-coast Dennery. The quarter-mile-long loop begins there and does not require a guide, but one is included in the trail fee of EC$25/US$10, so you may want to take one along to point out interesting stuff. Pay your fee at the ranger hut, which is up a short path from the parking area. (See details about the more difficult ridge hike, listed below.) The trail is open daily, 8:30am to 4:30pm; call the Department of Forestry at ☎ 758-450-2078 or 450-2231 to arrange for a guide.

Anse la Liberté is a new campground run by the National Trust, which is located just south of the small west-coast town of Canaries. So far, the grounds have a dozen tents, a few teepees, some basic bathing facilities, and four miles of nature trails. The 133-acre camp slopes down to a lovely bay, which you can reach on a 15-minute hike along a narrow path cut through thick vegetation. You must be accompanied by a Trust-trained guide, who will point out some of the 80 species of plants and 17 species of birds that inhabit the area. Arrange for a campsite or guide by calling the Trust, ☎ 758-452-5005.

The **Frégate Islands Nature Reserve Trail** is a 1.5km/.9m path on the mainland that substitutes for an actual visit to the truly off-limits Frégate Islands. Your EC$55/US$20 entrance fee into the Nature Reserve includes a required guide for the loop trail. Your walk along the short, twisting path passes a waterfall and mangrove swamp, and leads to a lookout point where you can view the Frégate Islands. It's best to call ahead for a guided tour of the interpretive center and trail, since the reserve may be closed if no visitors are expected. If this trail inspires you to explore more of the Atlantic Coast, continue on to the **Eastern Nature Trail** (see below) or schedule a canoe trip out to Praslin Island. Contact the National Trust for all tours, ☎ 758-452-5005.

More Challenging

Cas-en-Bas and the surrounding area is captivating and undeveloped. You can drive along the rough dirt roads in a four-wheel-drive vehicle, but walking it is better. Get there from the north by taking the secondary road off the highway north of Gros Islet and south of the turnoff to Pigeon Point. When you reach the end of the road, you'll be in the tiny village of Cas-en-Bas, where the mighty Atlantic rolls onto a pleasant beach. Don't swim here; the current is too strong.

The length and difficulty of your hike will depend on which direction you choose. South of the beach, a rocky path hugs the coast and takes you to Anse Lavoutte (allow about a half-hour each way), where leatherback turtles lay eggs from March until July. North of the Cas-en-Bas beach, another rocky path will take you to a secluded cove called **Secret Beach**, then on to **Donkey Beach** (allow 10-15 minutes to reach Secret and another 10-15 to reach Donkey). Wear sunscreen and good walking shoes, and carry plenty of water. You can cool off by going knee deep into the rocky surf, but it's too dangerous to swim at any of these beaches.

The Eastern Nature Trail is a 5.6km/3.5m track built by the National Trust to encourage exploration of the **Praslin Protected Landscape**, located south of the east-coast village of Dennery. You must have a guide (EC$60/US$22 per group for up to 15 people) and pay an entrance fee of EC$10/US$4 per person. The winding trail follows the coastline and cuts through wild grasslands high above the Atlantic. Bring binoculars to watch the magnificent frigates, herons, and other birds that soar above the landscape, and have your camera ready to capture panoramic vistas of the close-by satellite islands. If you choose not to hike the entire trail, you can leave the group at exit points designated at the end of each mile. Add on to your tour by hiking the Frégate Island Nature Reserve trail (see *Short & Easy*, above), which begins near the end of the Eastern Nature Trail, or taking the optional canoe trip out to Praslin Island. Tours run daily from August through April 9am to 5pm. Contact the National Trust to join a group or book a private guide, ☎ 758-452-5005.

The Barre de l'Isle Trail is a rigorous hike along the *barre*, or ridge, that divides the eastern and western parts of the Central Forest Reserve, which covers the middle of the island. Expect to spend an hour or two on the 2km/1.2m (one way) trail, and another couple of hours if you choose to climb 438m/1,437f Morne La Combe. It's a good use of a full morning. There are fantastic views at four observation points along the ridge, and you have a fair chance of spotting a St. Lucian parrot. From the top of La Combe, you can see 950m/3,116f Mount Gimie and both the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean.

The **Des Cartier Trail** is a 4km/2.5m loop that begins six miles inland from the east coast settlement of Micoud and crosses the **Quilesse Forest Reserve**. You don't need a guide, and if you travel alone or in a small

quiet group, you have a good chance of seeing a rare St. Lucian (Jacquot) parrot flying among the high tree tops deep in the rainforest. Some of the gommier trees grow to heights of more than 130 feet, and it's easy to understand how natives once carved boats from a single trunk. The trail is 300m/984f above the sea, well marked, and relatively flat. Allow an hour and a half or two hours to explore this part of the rainforest, and continue on to the Edmund Forest Reserve Trail (at the north end of the loop; see below), if you have enough time and energy. Des Cartiers begins at the ranger hut and interpretive center about five miles inland from Micoud. The trail fee is EC$25/US$10, and you may enter daily, 8am to 4pm; call ☎ 758-450-2078 to make arrangements.

The **Edmund Forest Reserve Trail** begins seven miles inland from the west-coast highway off the secondary road connecting Soufrière and Fond St. Jacques. Only the fit and tenacious should attempt this 10k/6.2m hike that requires a guide (to prevent you from getting lost on side trails) and about four hours of your day (one way). The trail is demanding, but the rewards are great. You'll have incomparable views of the Pitons and Mount Gimie, see huge ferns and incredibly beautiful wild orchids and bromeliads growing among the trees, and spot hummingbirds, parrots, and orioles. Expect to get wet since the Edmund Forest is one of the rainiest parts of the island. Reach the trailhead by driving about 5k/3m on a dirt road that branches off the main road and turns inland from the center of the village of Fond St. Jacques, going toward Mount Gimie. The ranger hut usually has guides available, but you may want to call the Department of Forestry a day or two in advance to make arrangements (☎ 758-450-2078). The trail isn't a loop, so plan to retrace your steps to return to your starting point, or arrange to be picked up at the trail's end (north of Micoud on the Mahaut road). The trail is open daily, 8am to 4pm; the entrance fee is EC$25/US$10.

Jungle Tours *has scheduled trips into the rainforest for beginning, intermediate, and advanced hikers. The EC$200/US$75 per person charge includes entrance fees, drinks, snacks, and lunch,* ☎ *758-450-0434, www.jungletoursstlucia.com.*

The **Enbas Saut Falls Trail** (which means "below the falls") starts near the ranger station at the beginning of the Edmund Trail (see above). The 4k/2.5m track winds through incredibly scenic terrain near the foot of Mount Gimie. Two waterfalls cascade into clean, clear pools at the head of the Troumasse River.

The **Forestière Rainforest Trail** begins near the village of Forestière, about 30 minutes inland by car from Castries. Start at the ranger hut, on the main road just east of the town's school. The 5k/3m loop slopes down

through dense ferns and trees into the central forest reserve and back up to the road. Allow a couple of hours to cover the entire route, and another hour if you want to climb the steps up Piton Flore, located about mid-way along the trail and topped by a TV tower. The ranger will collect an entrance fee of EC$25/US$10, but you can hike this one without a guide, ☎ 758-450-2078.

*A new **adventure center** now operates at Anse Mamin. The same pros that run Jungle Biking Adventures recently added other sports at the same location. You can purchase a **Jungle Reef Adventures Passport** that allows you to scuba, kayak, snorkel, and hike the forest trails. Call Jungle Reef Adventures for package rates, ☎ 758-457-1400.*

■ Golf

St. Lucia has two golf courses and plans are underway for a third. The **St. Lucia Golf and Country Club** is public and open year-round at Cap Estate on the most northern part of the island. The challenging 18-hole, par 71 course stretches across acres of rolling hills with incredible views. Facilities include a driving range, putting green, clubhouse with restaurant, and a pro shop where guests can rent clubs and motorized carts. Fees are about US$95 for 18 holes, including a cart and clubs. For tee times, call ☎ 758-450-8523.

Guests of the all-inclusive **Sandals Resorts** can play golf free of charge at the private nine-hole course laid out on the rolling hills above La Toc Bay. Non-guests may play for a greens fee of EC$50/US$20 plus mandatory caddy fees. Get details and schedule tee times by calling the resort, ☎ 758-452-3081.

Legendary pro golfer Jack Nicklaus has plans to design an 18-hole course at Point Hardy on the northern tip of the island. The US$100-million project is a joint venture between a US-based company and Cap Estate, which is home to the St. Lucia Golf and Country Club. When complete, the development will include luxury private homes and an upscale resort. Contact the St. Lucia Tourist Board for more information, ☎ 758-452-4094.

■ Tennis

Most visitors play tennis on courts at their resort, but if you're staying at a hotel without a court, you can play at **St. Lucia Rac-**

quet Club ☎ 758-450-0551. This first-class facility is praised as the best in the Antilles and features nine lighted courts and a well-outfitted pro shop. Court fees are EC$25US$10 per day, and rackets are available for an additional EC$20/US$8.

Squash courts are open to the public for a fee of EC$10/US$4 per hour at St. Lucia Racquet Club and **St. Lucia Yacht Club**, ☎ 758-452-8350.

On Wheels

For the most fun you can have on a bike, head for **Anse Mamin**, an adventure in itself. You can't get there on land, you must take a water taxi or hitch a ride on a fishing boat from Soufrière, or beg for a free lift on one of the dive boats at Scuba St. Lucia in Anse Chastanet. Anse Mamin is an isolated bay fronting 600-acres of woodlands and the ruins of an 18th-century plantation. Twelve miles of trails have been cut through the bush to provide a unique riding experience for novice, intermediate, and advanced bikers.

You'll be assigned a state-of-the-art Cannondale suspension bike and shown to the training course, where you can learn the basics of mountain biking or practice your skills. When you feel ready, you move on to the intermediate-level single-track trails that promise a roller coaster ride through dense foliage.

If you consider yourself an advanced rider, try the new championship course named **Tinker's Trail**, after Tinker Juarez of the Volvo-Cannondale racing team. This is one demanding ride, but if you feel comfortable on a bike and have plenty of strength and stamina, the pros will teach you the tricks of handling the extremely tight switchbacks and precipitous hills. The downhill ride promises a heart-pumping adrenalin rush that true champions crave.

Of course, you don't have to do the daredevil stuff. Most people just take their bike for a comfortable cruise along the eco-friendly compost trails that lead to historic ruins, fantastic hilltop vistas, and the beach.

Contact **Bike St. Lucia** for information on **Jungle Biking Adventures.** Expect to pay around EC$200/US$75 for a full-day package that includes equipment, lunch, and transportation by taxi (from Marigot Bay, cruise-ship docks, and north-island resorts) and boat (from Anse Chastanet). Bike rental and trail use only is in the EC$157/US$59 per day range. Bikes are not available for use off property. ☎ 758-459-2453 www.bikestlucia.com.

Road biking generally is not recommended on St. Lucia, but if you want to rent a bike to ride on less-traveled secondary roads contact **Cycle World** in Castries, ☎ 758-452-6955.

On Horseback

Some parts of the island are best seen on horseback, and St. Lucia has several facilities that offer hourly rental and specialty-riding tours. You'll see the island from a whole new perspective from atop a horse. Some outfitters allow you to take your equine buddy into the ocean for a swim. Others stick to forest paths or cliff trails along the coast. Expect to pay EC$50-100/US$20-40 per hour for guided tours, or about EC$150/US$56 for packages that may include transportation to the stables, drinks, or a meal.

Créole horses are available at some stables. They are an indigenous breed that is rather small, but strong and good-natured, which makes them especially good for beginning riders.

Trim's Stables, near Cas-en-Bas, has rides designed for beginners or experienced horsemen. One of their most popular trips is the picnic ride along the Atlantic coast. They also offer lessons and carriage tours, ☎ 758-450-8273.

Country Saddles, at Marquis Estate near Babonneau, is known for exciting trips through the scenic countryside and along the coast. They have horses appropriate for beginners as well as skilled riders, and their guides structure tours to provide maximum fun for the clients' experience levels, ☎ 758-450-5467.

International Riding Stables, Gros Islet, offers both English-style and western-style riding. The stables are located at the old Beausejour Estate, and riders have a choice of three tours geared to various skill levels. You can even take a swim with your horse, ☎ 758-452-8139.

North Point Riding Stables, located at Cap Estate, organizes group rides to the remote northeastern coast, Pigeon Point, and Gros Islet, ☎ 758-450-8853.

Trail Trekkers, at Morne Coubaril Estate, has nature trails to explore around the plantation, and riders may choose English or western saddles. They also arrange multi-day trips that cover the entire island, ☎ 758-459-7340.

Shopping

Visitors will find St. Lucia's shops full of good buys. Look for handcrafted items such as **batik**, **pottery**, **wood carvings**, **shell jewelry**, and **straw** products. Also, **electronics**, **crystal**,

leather items, and luxury **jewelry** often are bargains, especially at the duty-free shops.

Shoppers typically look for jewelry when they come to the Caribbean because retailers are known to offer significantly lower prices than stores in the US or Europe. Often these shops purchase merchandise directly from the manufacturers and pay little or no import fees, so they can pass the savings on to you. Large stores with branches on multiple islands usually offer the best discounts due to the savings they derive from high-volume buying. Expect to find a good selection of diamonds and other precious stones, gold chains, watches, and high-fashion jewelry.

If you think you may want to buy jewelry, watches, crystal, or other luxury items while you're on vacation, visit a few stores before you leave home and write down prices of pieces that interest you. When you get to St. Lucia, you'll be able to make informed decisions about prices and standards of quality.

To guarantee that you buy only high-quality merchandise, shop in well-established stores with a good reputation. If you aren't sure, ask for advice from the staff at your hotel or on your cruise ship. You also can judge by the appearance of the store, its sales staff, and brochures. If it's a company with outlets on several islands, it's probably a reputable store. However, many local businesses with only one store are equally reliable, so keep an open mind. If the shop offers a guarantee and a certified appraisal on its merchandise, you can buy with confidence. Be sure to ask if the store has an office or contact near your home for after-sale services.

A wide variety of stores are located in La Place Carenage, Gablewoods Mall, JQ Charles Mall, and Pointe Seraphine. In addition, many of the large resorts feature boutiques and gift shops. Traditional outdoor markets are held in Castries and Soufrière, and the best place for local arts and crafts is the Choiseul Craft Center.

Most stores in Castries and Soufrière are open Monday through Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm, and many close from 12:30pm to 1:30pm for lunch. On Saturdays, shops in both towns are open from 8:30am to 12:30pm. If a cruise ship is in port on a Sunday, some stores in Castries open for a few hours in the morning. Shopping centers such as Pointe Seraphine, La Place Carenage, JQ Charles Mall, and Gablewoods Mall are usually open weekdays, 8:30am to 5pm, and Saturdays, 8:30am to 2pm. Marina stores keep later hours and are typically open on Sundays as well. Most merchants accept major credit cards.

*You must show your **passport** and **airline ticket** or **cruise-ship ID papers** to qualify for duty-free prices.*

Castries

■ Malls & Markets

Castries' Central Market has been an outlet for local vendors for more than 100 years. It occupies several buildings and adjacent outdoor spaces near the intersection of Jeremie Street and Peynier Street. The old iron structure is still visible in some of the walls, and you can't miss the original cement fountain near the craft vendors. Saturday morning is the best time to visit. Look for good buys on coal pots, hot-pepper sauces, T-shirts, straw items, herbs, spices, cocoa sticks and picnic supplies.

La Place Carenage has been expanded and spiffed up. About 27,000 additional square feet and 14 new retail stores were added at a cost of more than US$6 million. By the time you visit, roof-top restaurants, coffee shops, and ice cream parlors should be open, and the tourist board will have a new office on the ground floor. The shopping complex is on Jeremie Street at the North Wharf, in Castries, ☎ 758-452-7318. Here are a few of the most interesting shops.

- **Modern Art Gallery** displays a superb collection of Caribbean avant-garde art; ☎ 758-452-9079.
- **Noah's Arkade** offers a large variety of Caribbean-made items, many created by St. Lucians; ☎ 758-452-2523.
- **Bagshaw Studios** is a local operation that creates clothes and household items with silk-screened designs; ☎ 758-451-6565.
- **Little Switzerland** has a large selection of famous-name Swiss watches, crystal, china, and jewelry. Their shops are well-known throughout the Caribbean Islands and they give guarantees and certified appraisals; ☎ 758-452-7587.

Pointe Seraphine is a large Spanish-style duty-free mall located near the main cruise ship dock on the north side of Castries Bay. A ferry runs back and forth across the bay, so if you have a car, you can park on either side and avoid driving through town. A tourist information office is located in the courtyard. Some of the best shopping is available at the following stores:

- **Little Switzerland** has a second shop here; see above for description; ☎ 758-451-6785.

■ **Colombian Emeralds** features emerald jewelry, other fine gemstones and international watches. They're known for significant savings, full guarantees, certified appraisals and US after-sales service; ☎ 758-453-7721.

■ **Jewellers Warehouse** claims to save you 50% on all merchandise; ☎ 758-453-7281.

■ **Diamonds in Paradise** specializes in romantic diamond pieces; ☎ 758-452-7223.

■ **Essence** highlights designer clothing and accessories from around the world; ☎ 758-452-3028.

■ **Benetton** sells the familiar Italian fashions. You'll find a selection of unique stripes, prints and colors in the latest styles with duty-free prices; ☎ 758-452-7685.

■ **Banana Beach Shop** stocks T-shirts, swimsuits, snorkeling gear, suntan lotion, and other beach necessities. In addition, they carry cookbooks, place mats, and other household items featuring the charming watercolor prints of Caribbean artist Jill Walker; ☎ 758-452-6909.

■ **Natur Pur Designer Clothing** is made from all natural fibers and designed by Sylvie Calderbank. You can choose from linen or cotton; ☎ 758-452-4252.

■ **PEER** has coordinated cotton clothes with colorful prints and embroidery designs. Adult and children's sizes are available in T-shirts, shorts, caps, and more; ☎ 758-453-0815.

■ **Noah's Arkade** has several shops around the island. All carry a good selection of imaginative handcrafted items such as straw hats, steel pans, hammocks, and jams, along with books, maps, film, and suntan products. Another store is on Jeremie Street in town; ☎ 758-452-2523.

■ **Bagshaw Studios** is an internationally known family-run silkscreening business that makes colorful cotton and linen fabrics and gifts. If you have time, visit the working studio at La Toc Bay; ☎ 758-452-7570.

■ **Studio Images** promises a 30-50% discount on fragrances by Calvin Klein, Oscar de la Renta, Ralph Lauren, Christian Dior and many other well-known international designers. They also offer good buys on designer sunglasses, watches, leather goods, and gifts; ☎ 758-452-3687.

■ **Oasis** has sports gear, men's casual wear, sandals, and shoes. They also carry ladies' fashions, swimwear, fashion handbags, and T-shirts; ☎ 758-452-1185.

■ **St. Lucia Fine Art** displays a large selection of fine local, Caribbean, and international art. Be sure to look for works by internationally known St. Lucian artist Llewellyn Xavier; ☎ 758-459-0891.

You can call for an appointment to see Llewellyn Xavier's collection at his studio in Cap Estate, ☎ 758-450-9155.

■ Top Shops & Galleries

Artsibit Gallery, at the corner of Brazil and Mongiraud Streets, exhibits a large collection of well-priced art by local artists. In addition, you'll find pottery, sculpture, even postcards. Among the featured artists, don't miss the fantastic works of Derek Walcott, Arnold Toulon, and Ron Savory. A smaller collection is displayed at the Artsibit Gallery on Rodney Bay. ☎ 758-452-7865.

Caribelle Batik, 37 Old Victoria Road on Morne Fortuné, designs batik-art clothes and wall hangings. Visitors are welcome at the working studio and shop located in a charming old two-story Victorian-style home that's been beautifully renovated. You can watch the artisans at work on this ancient fabric art, enjoy a drink on the terrace overlooking the northern coast, and peek into the orchid nursery Monday through Friday, 8:30am to 4pm, and Saturday, 8:30am to 12:30pm. ☎ 758-452-3785.

Bagshaw Studios, overlooking the sea at La Toc, welcomes visitors to their workshop where they turn out popular silk-screened creations. Shops are scattered around the Castries area, but watching the designs emerge from the studio is especially worthwhile. Drop in Monday through Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm, or Saturday, 8:30am to noon, ☎ 758-452-7921.

Music lovers will find a good selection of island rhythms at **Sights 'n Sounds**, 46 Micoud Street, ☎ 758-451-9600.

Bryden and Partners Ltd.,on Jeremie Street, stocks a well-priced assortment of Piton beer, Caribbean rums, and other liquors, ☎ 758-452-5106.

The Perfumery, at the Green Parrot Inn on Morne Fortuné above the city, sells the intoxicating scents of the Caribbean in a bottle, ☎ 758-452-3167.

Caribbean Perfumes creates several fragrances for women and two aftershave lotions for men. They are blended from the flowers and tropical

plants that grow on the island, and priced to fit most budgets. You can find Caribbean Perfumes at many resort gift shops. ☎ 758-453-7249.

Eudovic Art Studio, south of the city in Goodlands, is the working studio of St. Lucian artist Vincent Joseph Eudovic. He has been creating contemporary sculptures from the wood and roots of native trees since he won a national award at the age of 11. Over the years, he has won additional international awards, and his studio has expanded to include a restaurant, guest house gallery, and souvenir store. Visitors are welcome at the outdoor workshop and indoor gallery and shop that feature art and crafts by Eudovic and other local artisans. ☎ 758-452-2747.

Outside Castries

■ Malls

Gablewoods Mall, on the Gros Islet Highway north of town, has an assortment of shops that sell everything from local crafts to groceries and household products. Some of the shops that are of interest to tourists include:

■ **Top Banana** has locations all over the island and features fashion beach wear made by well-known companies such as Speedo, Hunza, and La Blanca. They also carry diving gear, towels, caps, and T-shirts; ☎ 758-452-8351.

■ **Peppermint Boutique** features beach wear, women's fashions, men's clothing, and local handmade gift items; ☎ 758-453-0008.

■ **Island Connection** carries pure cotton clothing such as T-shirts, shorts, and vests. Designs are embroidered on your purchases while you wait; ☎ 758-452-5432.

■ **Sunshine Bookshop** features work by the island's Nobel Laureate for Literature, Derek Walcott, as well as international newspapers, magazines, novels, and travel books; ☎ 758-452-3222.

■ **Made In St. Lucia** presents arts, crafts, and gifts made by local artisans; ☎ 758-453-2788.

■ **Sea Island Cotton Shop** features beach wear, T-shirts, fashion clothing, and original handicrafts; ☎ 758-452-1185.

■ **Cards & Things**, in the food court, carries a good selection of greeting cards, gifts and other items; ☎ 758-452-6248.

JQ Charles Mall, near Rodney Bay, is a multi-level complex with a well-stocked supermarket, a food court, and several upscale shops.

- **Sunshine Bookshop**, carrying Caribbean authors and international magazines; ☎ 758-452-2322.
- **Koko Tok** features apparel made from linen and cotton; ☎ 758-458-0160.
- **Basic Blue** has Dockers and Levis; ☎ 758-458-0351.
- **Panache Limited** is the place for Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, and Calvin Klein fans; ☎ 758-458-0440.
- **Heritage** is a gift shop and boutique that endeavors to be a one-stop shopping solution. Located at Rodney Bay across from the Lime Restaurant, they have souvenirs, art, T-shirts, swimsuits, maps, disposable cameras, pottery, spices, and a long list of other items commonly needed by tourists. ☎ 758-452-8240.

■ Specialty Items

The Art and Craft Cooperative in the little village of Choiseul is worth a visit. The workshop isn't open to the public, but you can purchase baskets, wood carvings, pottery, and other items made by residents from local materials. Prices are good, and the quality is excellent, but service is sometimes indifferent. Go for the unique buys; ☎ 758-453-2338.

After Dark

Don't miss the weekly Friday night street party in **Gros Islet**. The jump-up starts at sundown when the streets are blocked off, bands set up on improvised stages, and residents set up barbeque grills on street corners to cook skewered conch, chicken, fish, and beef. Tourists and locals crowd into the streets hung with strings of lights to eat, dance, and listen to the drum-heavy beat of the island music. Plan to take a taxi, because parking is a nightmare, and you don't want to drive home on the narrow roads after partying all night. The festivities go on until early Saturday morning.

A smaller, but similar, event takes place each Friday at **Anse La Raye**. Residents call their event a **fish fry**, but there's often music by a local band, a lot of rum and beer drinking, and dancing in the streets. On Saturday nights, the small east-coast town of **Dennery** turns out for a comparable party.

Music & Events

The annual **Jazz Festival** takes place each May, and all nightlife centers on international performers who play at outdoor concerts. On other nights, you'll find bands and individuals playing throughout the island, because music is an important part of St. Lucia's culture. The large resorts schedule steel bands, reggae singers, and jazz groups to entertain guests most nights of the week. In addition, there are karaoke bars, piano bars, discos, and night clubs. Some restaurants host theme-night buffets with limbo dancers, fire eaters, and dance bands. For ticket information and a schedule of events contact the **Jazz Shop,** ☎ 758-451-8566, www.stluciajazz.org.

For current information on what's happening on the island, pick up a copy of *Tropical Traveller*, a free publication that keeps up with local bands, special events, and activities of interest to both locals and visitors. You'll see stacks of them at restaurants, hotels, and tourist spots.

A variety of performances are held frequently at the open-air **Derek Walcott Center for The Arts**, adjacent to the historic **Great House Restaurant** at Cap Estate, ☎ 758-450-0450. You may be fortunate enough to catch a performance of St. Lucian Nobel Prize-winner Derek Walcott's works. Also, check the schedule at the **Folk Research Centre** on Morne Pleasant, ☎ 758-452-2279. Traditional island songs and dances are performed throughout the year, but the best take place during Carnival. If movies are more your style, call to see what's showing at **Cinema 2000** near Rodney Bay, ☎ 758-452-8802.

Chef Harry hosts entertainment at **The Green Parrot Restaurant** on Morne Fortuné every Wednesday and Saturday, ☎ 758-452-3399. **JJ's Restaurant**, north of Marigot Bay, runs a Friday Night Jam as an alternative to Gros Islet's street party, ☎ 758-451-4076. Out on Pigeon Point, jazz lovers will enjoy the occasional live music at the cozy **Captain's Cellar,** ☎ 758-450-0918.

You can depend on a lot of action at **Rodney Bay** most nights, and especially on weekends. Popular Caribbean and international music plays at **Indies** every Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday night, ☎ 758-452-0727. The club runs a shuttle from most large hotels, and the action starts up around 11 pm. Most nights, a singer entertains at **The Lime,** and **Late Lime** (located next door) hosts live music and dancing late on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, ☎ 758-452-0282. **Shamrocks Pub** is an Irish-style bar with pub food, beer, pool tables, dart boards, and a live band each weekend, ☎ 758-452-8725. Don't miss the belly dancer at **Razmataz** on Saturday nights, ☎ 758-452-9800.

Where To Stay

St. Lucia has many excellent accommodations ranging from luxury resorts to inexpensive guest houses. The island is quickly becoming a top destination for vacationers who favor all-inclusive resorts or deluxe private villas, and the selection of upscale lodging is splendid. In addition, budget-minded travelers are drawn to the small, privately-owned local inns that offer high-standards at affordable rates.

The majority of hotels are clustered near the capital on the densely populated northwestern coast, while the island's international airport is in the south. When you make airline reservations, ask which airport you will be flying into, and check to see how far it is from the place you plan to stay. You may want to change planes in Puerto Rico or another Caribbean Island, so that you can take a regional flight into George Charles Airport, which is near the resorts located on the best beaches.

International jets land at Hewanorra International on the southern tip of the island, near Vieux Fort, where there are few accommodations. In recent years, excellent accommodations have opened near the southern town of Soufrière. Mid-way up the west coast, Marigot Bay offers a cluster of small, but luxurious, hotels and inns.

All-Inclusives

You may find the all-inclusive concept the perfect answer to budgeting for a vacation. With one payment, you take care of lodging, food, and most activities and entertainment. You can forget about tipping, leave your wallet locked in your room safe when you go to the beach, and eat and drink as much as you want without worrying about the bill. But, be aware that you might not be the all-inclusive type. You may miss the experience of sampling a variety of restaurants, nightclubs, day-trips, and snorkeling sites. Before you decide, ask the following questions:

- Are all meals buffet style?
- Does the menu change from day to day?
- How many restaurants are included in the plan?
- Does the price include both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks?
- Is wine served with dinner?
- What activities are included?
- Is entertainment scheduled every night?

■ What complimentary sports equipment is available?

■ Is complimentary transportation provided for trips into town?

■ Is there a program for children, and is babysitting available? (Ask this question even if you don't plan to bring children, and be cautious of booking a family-style resort if you're looking for a couples or singles experience.)

Villas

Private rental properties are scattered along St. Lucia's coast and throughout the lush countryside. Consider booking one of these multi-room houses if you need extra space for friends or family, enjoy cooking your own meals and snacking out of your own refrigerator, or just want to avoid the usual tourist spots. Some rentals include extras, such as a car, transportation from the airport, maid service, kitchen provisioning, or an on-call chef.

Some properties are lavish vacation homes with all the modern conveniences and a staff of caretakers. Others are homey, well-used cottages that owners vacate when they have a renter. Most are something in between. Avoid disappointment by asking the following:

■ Has the rental agent actually been to the property? (Pictures don't count.)

■ Is the villa immaculately clean?

■ Who does the cleaning? (Professional services tend to do a more thorough job than owners.)

■ What personal articles are left at the property by the owner? (Must you squeeze your clothes into a closet already packed with the owner's stuff?)

■ How many and what size beds are in each bedroom?

■ Does the bathroom have a tub and shower?

■ Is hot water available at all times?

■ Are all linens supplied? How about a change of sheets? Extra towels? Soap?

■ Are laundry facilities available? Are guests expected to wash soiled linens, or are they left in place at departure?

■ Are all rooms air conditioned?

■ Are ceiling or room fans available?

■ Do windows have screens?

- What appliances are in the kitchen? What is their age and condition?
- Is the kitchen stocked with basic supplies?
- Where is the nearest grocery store, and does it carry a wide range of imported as well as local products?
- How far away are beaches, restaurants, neighbors?
- Is there a restriction or charge for use of electricity or water?
- What insurance covers damages or an accidents?
- Is a damage deposit required?

■ Rental Agencies

VILLAS OF DISTINCTION
PO Box 55
Armonk, NY 10504
☎ 914-273-3331 or 800-289-0900
www.villasofdistinction.com

With more than three dozen listings on St. Lucia, VOD is sure to have a perfect match for you. Click "Specials" for good bargains.

CARIBBEAN VILLA OWNERS ASSOCIATION
☎ 877-248-2862
www.cvoa.com

You contact the owners or managing agents directly after you find a listed villa that meets your requirements. Once a reservation is set up, check back with the association for wholesale airfare.

ISLAND TRIPS
☎ 410-692-2093 or 800-823-2002
www.islandtrips.com

The owner of this company has a villa of her own on St. Lucia, so she knows the island well. The staff has inspected most of the listed properties themselves, and the agency offers help with airfare, car rental, and on-island services.

TROPICAL VILLAS ST. LUCIA
PO Box 189, Castries
☎ 758-450-8240 or 758-450-0349, www.tropicalvillas.net

With offices in Castries, this agency handles many villas in the classy residential area of Cap Estate as well as other parts of the island. All have swimming pools and a staff.

Resorts & Hotels

The St. Lucia Hotel and Tourism Association lists members on their web site and offers a toll-free central reservation number, ☎ 888-744-2772. If you find yourself without accommodations after you arrive on the island, contact the association for assistance, ☎ 758-452-5978, www.stluciatravel.com.lc.

St. Lucia's hotels add an 8% government tax and a 10% service charge to basic room rates. These charges may be included in the quoted price, but be sure to ask. Rates at all-inclusive resorts have taxes and service charges built in, and most small inns include them in their prices.

■ Hotel Price Guide

ACCOMMODATIONS PRICE SCALE
Scale indicates rates charged per night during high-season for a standard double room for two adults. All prices are given in US dollars, not including taxes. All-inclusive rates are indicated by "AI" in the listing.
$ . . . . . Under $100
$$ . . . . . $101 to $200
$$$ . . . . . $201 to 300
$$$$ . . . . . Over $300

■ Northwest Coast

EAST WINDS INN
Labrelotte Bay
☎ 758-452-8212, fax 758-452-9941
www.eastwinds.com
30 rooms
$$$$ (AI)

If you're looking for a quiet, refined inn with five-star European-style elegance and grace, you'll find it tucked away on a secluded beach just five miles from the capital. East Winds was created by owner Giuseppe Olivares to be a romantic, all-inclusive hideaway. Under the management of Gareth Leach, it meets all expectations. While its amenities are

first-class, its ambiance is best described as beachcomber-chic – unpretentious but genteel, hedonistic yet civilized.

Ideally situated at the end of a long road off the main highway between Castries and Rodney Bay, the inn consists of 30 rooms in 15 duplex cottages scattered over eight acres of lush gardens that ring with wild-bird songs and occasional squawks from Mac and Erik, the resident parrots. A central open-air lounge is furnished with comfortable seating and a selection of books and games that invite relaxation and impromptu gatherings.

The gourmet kitchen specializes in imaginative meals that please even the most demanding guests. Returning guests, who sometimes stay for two weeks, never complain of a lack of variety. Each day, the kitchen receives freshly caught fish and lobster from local fisherman, and herbs, vegetables, and fruits are selected at the market or purchased from nearby farms. Buffet breakfasts and lunches feature island fruits and vegetables along with cooked-to-order dishes and daily specialties. But the best offerings are presented at candlelight dinners, where haute cuisine meals are graciously served by an attentive staff that never lets a wine glass sit half-full.

One of the best moments of the day occurs late in the afternoon. Guests order a cool drink from the thatched-roof bar and carry it down to the beach to watch the amazing technicolor Caribbean sunset. During the day, the long, palm-studded stretch of sand is popular with sun worshipers. Those with more energy swim out to the small reef in the middle of the bay to snorkel, or take one of the kayaks out for a spin on the calm water. Dining or relaxing *en plein air* is possible under the roomy thatched-roof huts set back from the water.

A large freeform pool with a wide deck lures guests in the afternoon. The cleverly designed swim-up bar is generously stocked so that swimmers can help themselves to a variety of refreshments, including beer, wine, and top-brand liquors. At four o'clock, tea and fresh-baked treats are served poolside.

Guest rooms in the single-level moss-green cottages are spacious and cooled by gentle trade winds assisted by ceiling fans. The bedrooms feature lovely furniture and fabrics, and the large bathrooms have unusual stone-lined indoor-outdoor showers that allow guests private-but-open bathing. Each room opens onto a private patio outfitted with a small refrigerator, sink, table, and chairs.

VILLA BEACH COTTAGES
Choc Bay Beach
☎ 758-450-2884, 800-600-2688, fax 758-450-4529
www.villabeachcottages.com
14 suites & cottages
$$$

Located four miles from Castries, and right on the sand at Choc Bay, these gingerbread-trimmed one- and two-bedroom air conditioned cottages have four-poster beds, ceiling fans, living areas, a fully equipped kitchen, and large balconies with hammocks. If you're celebrating a special occasion, ask for the two-level Honeymoon Villa, which has a spiral staircase leading up from the ground-floor living/dining area to a large bedroom.

The resort is thoroughly modern, but decorated to appear "old Caribbean." Original local art hangs on the walls (some by the St. Lucian Nobel Prize-winner Derek Walcott), and the little swimming pool that overlooks the sea has a unique rock waterfall.

As a guest, you get a lot of amenities you might not expect from such a tiny resort. **Coconuts Restaurant** prepares and serves meals on request, all types of watersports equipment is available on the beach, and you can shop at the gift store, pick up necessities at the mini-mart, and hire a car from the on-site rental desk.

Villa Beach Cottages' sister resort is La Dauphine Estate in Soufrière. Ask about splitting your vacation time between the two properties. La Dauphine is a 200-acre plantation with two refurbished Colonial-style houses, one with two bedrooms, the other with four. The estate is isolated in the jungle about four miles south of Soufrière. Use the Villa Beach contact numbers and web site to make reservations and get more information.

WINDJAMMER LANDING BEACH RESORT
Labrelotte Bay
☎ 758-456-9000 or 800-743-9609, fax 758-452-0907
www.windjammer-landing.com
114 rooms and villas
$$$

Driving down the steep road that leads through this vacation village to the lobby, you pass white stucco Mediterranean-style villas with arched windows and red tiled roofs connected by brick pathways and partially hidden by flowering vines and tall trees. After check in, you'll be escorted to a villa with one to four bedrooms, a living/dining area, and a full kitchen. Each is decorated with bright Caribbean colors, and doors open

onto a large private terrace with majestic ocean views. Some of the one-bedroom units and all larger villas also have splendid private plunge pools.

Even standard rooms are special at Windjammer. Each features one queen or two twin beds, air conditioning and ceiling fan, mini fridge, coffee maker, cable television, and a private terrace with a garden view. Deluxe rooms have a queen-size bed, all the amenities of a standard room, and a private terrace and sundeck with an ocean view.

On 55 acres of lushly landscaped hillside, the resort offers four dining options, three bars, a shopping arcade, on-site car rental, a gym and spa, tennis courts, a fully staffed activities desk that organizes daily programs, and a supervised children's program. Down on lovely Labrellote Bay, the long sandy beach is lined with palm trees and dotted with lounge chairs. A sports center offers all types of water toys for both kids and adults, including water skiing, banana-log rides, paddle boats, kayaks, and snorkeling equipment. The dive shop arranges excursions to the best scuba areas around the island, and offers both introduction and certification courses.

Four freshwater pools provide plenty of room for swimming, floating, and water games. Almost every afternoon, one of the activity directors encourages guests to join in a game of water volleyball or other sport. For an additional charge, the hotel will arrange horseback riding, Jeep excursions, and boat trips. Each night, there's some type of entertainment in one of the bars or restaurants.

It's possible to stay on the grounds during your entire vacation without becoming bored with either the food or activities. The place is so large, a complimentary shuttle runs continuously up and down the steep hills transporting guests from one spot to another.

Dining options include four full restaurants and three full-service bars. **Papa Don's Restaurant**, up the hill next to one of the pools, offers Greek and Italian dishes. The brick-oven pizzas are especially popular, and there's a surprise special every night. **Mango Tree** looks like an elegant plantation manor and serves wonderful seafood and steak dinners in a romantic setting overlooking the sea. **Josephine's** is an open-air restaurant set high above the beach with a gorgeous view of the bay. Créole and island specials dominate the menu, and a lavish brunch buffet is served every Sunday. **Jammers Beach Bar** separates the beach from the main pool, and offers burgers, sandwiches, salads, and snacks all day and evening. At five o'clock each afternoon, a bell rings to announce happy hour. A unique dining option is called **villa dining**. This is a great way to celebrate a romantic evening on your private patio or entertain friends. A chef helps you plan the menu, then comes to your villa to prepare your private dinner party.

CLUB ST. LUCIA BY SPLASH

Anse du Cap
☎ 758-450-0551 or 800-600-2688, fax 758-450-9544
www.splashresorts.com
372 rooms, including 55 suites
$$$$ (AI)

Far on the northern end of the island, this everything-to-everybody all-inclusive resort situated on 47 garden-like acres is St. Lucia's largest resort. You can get married in one of the two wedding chapels that overlook the sea, play some tennis on one of the lighted courts, workout in the gym, take a sailboat or kayak out for a spin around the bay, snuggle with someone special on one of the two beaches, drop the wee darlings at the supervised **Kid's Club** for the day, get in on the volleyball game in one of the three pools, or sprawl on a hammock stretched between two palm trees, order a fruity rum punch from one of three bars, and ask someone to wake you in time for dinner at one of the three restaurants.

All rooms are in one-level bungalows spread among the hills, and each has a king-size bed with room for an additional single bed. Most rooms are air conditioned but others are cooled by ceiling fans, and all open onto private patios. Larger suites have separate living areas that are cooled by ceiling fans and can be converted into sleeping space.

All-inclusive rates include meals, snacks, drinks, watersports, playing privileges at the fine on-site St. Lucia Racquet Club, scheduled recreational activities, live musical entertainment each night, and a supervised kid's program. Sightseeing, golf, scuba diving, and spa treatments can be arranged at an additional charge.

THE BODY HOLIDAY AT LESPORT

Cariblue Beach
☎ 758-450-8551 or 800-600-2688, fax 758-450-0368
www.thebodyholiday.com
100 rooms, two suites
$$$$ (AI)

Not actually a health spa, but more than a resort, LeSport bills its product as a Body Holiday. This means that for one price, guests at this outstandingly gorgeous 18-acre facility can have an active resort vacation while enjoying the pampering treatments usually found at upscale spas. You can laze about in your robe, take a yoga class, work up a sweat in the gym, or explore the island by bike. The program is completely up to you.

All rooms are large and handsomely decorated with cool tile floors, marble baths, four-poster king-size beds, and a private terrace with a view of the ocean. Breakfast and lunch are served buffet style, and dinner is à la carte except for special theme nights. Meals are nutritious and filling, and while you may tire of the repetition, the dishes are tasty and well-prepared. Wine and dessert accompany every meal, so you will hardly feel

deprived. If you want to diet, simply choose from the selection of light cuisine. Live bands entertain during dinner, and you can stay on for the floor show and dancing afterwards.

LeSport is known for its excellent sports and sports instruction. Scuba lessons are given for beginners, and certified divers can dive to 70 feet right from the shore. Waterskiing and windsurfing equipment and instruction are available, and you can also join an aerobics class in the pool. Bike tours are scheduled daily, and there are several jogging routes in and around the resort. Classes include such things as stretching, yoga, tai chi, aerobics, and stress management. You may be interested in a cocktail-mixing class or finally learning to calypso. Beauty and rejuvenation treatments in the tranquil Oasis spa include massage, hair treatments, sauna, and facials. Save time each day to enjoy the sandy beach.

RENDEZVOUS
Malabar Beach
☎ 800-544-2883 or 758-452-4211, fax 758-452-7419
100 rooms and suites
$$$$ (AI)

Rendezvous with your significant other at this couples-only resort tucked away on seven acres of lushly landscaped grounds and two miles of Caribbean beach. You can get married or renew your vows or simply bask in the luxury of being alone together on vacation.

The agenda at Rendezvous is geared toward pampering twosomes with plenty of individual and group activities in an intimate environment. Catamaran cruises, scuba diving, windsurfing, and water skiing are all complimentary, but you can wander hand-in-hand through the garden, loll on the beach, or spend all day in the hammock on your private patio, if you wish. Guests enjoy two pools, a sauna, hot tub, gym, and two lighted tennis courts.

In the evening, there's live music during dinner, and the piano player will stay at the bar as long as someone stays up to listen. Meals are served in the casual open-air Terrace Restaurant or the more formal air conditioned Trysting Place. A pair of chefs, plan and prepare a variety of menu choices, and you're unlikely to tire of either the buffets laid out at the Terrace or the multi-course meals served at Trysting Place.

All rooms are air conditioned and have ceiling fans and king-size four-poster beds. If you choose a standard room (called superior), ask to be on the top floor so you can see the water. These rooms are relatively small, but they all have a balcony or patio. The upper-category rooms are larger with good views of the sea, and the suites are exquisitely decorated with special amorous touches. There are no TVs on the property, but no one ever notices.

BAY GARDENS HOTEL
Rodney Bay
☎ 758-452-8060 or 800-600-2688, fax 758-452-8059
www.baygardenshotel.com
71 rooms
$$

Reduit Beach and all the facilities and nightspots of Rodney Bay are within walking distance, which makes this medium-sized hotel popular with vacationers without a car. If you don't want to leave the property, you can lounge around the two swimming pools, have all your meals at **Spices**, the on-site restaurant, and relax in the lush gardens, which are the pride of owners Joyce and Desmond Destang.

Air conditioned rooms are designated either standard or superior; all are spacious and feature patios or balconies, small refrigerators, and cable TV. The superior rooms have a few more amenities, such as Jacuzzi bathtubs and ceiling fans. Executive suites have a small kitchenette and a sitting area with a sleeper sofa. This isn't a luxurious resort, but the rooms are bright and clean, the grounds are charming, and you get a lot for your money.

The Bay Gardens recently took over the 32-room Palm Tree Hotel, which is next door. The hotel has been completely refurbished and given a new name, **Bay Gardens Inn**. Rooms are a bit smaller than at the main hotel, but equally charming. Double-room rates are in the US$100 range, and if you are a guest at either hotel, you may use the facilities of both. Information and reservations are available at ☎ 758-452-8200.

Part of Bay Gardens' charm is the general manager, Berthia Parle. She won the 2003 Golden Conch Award, which is presented to the "Hotelier of the Year" at the annual Caribbean Hotel Industry Conference. Parle puts high value on giving each guest personal service.

Reduit Beach, photo © Julian Calder

REX PAPILLON ST. LUCIA
Reduit Beach
☎ 758-452-0984 or 800-255-5859, fax 758-452-9332
www.rexcaribbean.com
140 Rooms
$$$$ (AI)

REX ST. LUCIAN
Reduit Beach
☎ 758-452-8351 or 800-255-5859, fax 758-452-8331
www.rexcaribbean.com
120 Rooms
$$$

ROYAL ST. LUCIAN RESORT & SPA
Reduit Beach
☎ 758-452-9999 or 800-255-5859, fax 758-452-9639
www.rexcaribbean.com
96 suites
$$$$

As sister resorts on St. Lucia's longest beach, these three Rex properties cover a wide range of vacation preferences. Papillon is the all-inclusive resort that has soared in popularity due partially to the well-known Rex name. Its lovely rooms have king-size beds or two twins. Each is decorated in soft island colors, rattan furniture, and cool tile floors. Superior rooms have upgraded furniture, bathtubs, and cable television. If you book beachfront accommodations, your room will have a sitting area and refreshment bar. Meals are served in both the main restaurant, **The Monarch**, or in the casual beach bar-café. Entertainment is presented nightly in the **Tropigala Lounge,** and day-time activity centers around watersports on the beach or the butterfly-shaped swimming pool (*papillon* is French for butterfly).

If you don't want an all-inclusive package, opt for The Rex St. Lucian. It has large rooms with either a balcony or patio and either a king-size or two twin-size beds. Guests come back year after year because of the relaxed ambiance, lush Eden-like gardens, and comparatively low rates. Decorations lean toward the island look with rattan furniture and print bedspreads and drapes. Poolside rooms are in the midst of all the action, while Superior accommodations are set back in the quiet tropical landscape. Book one of the Beachfront rooms for additional space, cable TV, a sitting area, and refreshment bar.

The Royal St. Lucian Resort & Spa is the most luxurious of the three Rex properties, and offers exquisite accommodations in a variety of suites. Deluxe suites overlook the gardens and waterfall pool. All have separate air conditioned bedrooms, sitting rooms with ceiling fans, cable TV, a mini-bar, and fabulous bathrooms with two sinks and soft robes. If you

want an ocean view, book a Seaview suite, and for direct waterfront access, ask for a Beachfront suite, which also has a larger living area. Go all out with a Grand Deluxe suite, which features oversized rooms and a dining terrace. Since meals aren't included in the Royal rates, you can try all the nearby restaurants on Rodney Bay, or dine at the three open-air restaurants located on the lushly landscaped complex. Seafood and island-style meals are favored at open-air **La Nautique**, the resort's award-winning **L'Epicure** features gourmet specialties, and authentic Asian dishes are served at the **Oriental Restaurant**. On the beach, you'll find a dive shop and a sports center offering snorkeling, windsurfing, water skiing, and boating. Spa services include massage, facials, and hydrotherapy; the gym is outfitted with Cybex equipment.

SANDALS HALCYON ST. LUCIA

Choc Bay
☎ 758-453-0222 or 800-600-2688, fax 758-451-8435
www.sandals.com
170 rooms
$$$$ (AI)

The well-known Sandals Resorts cater to couples and specialize in all-inclusive luxury vacations. Three St. Lucia resorts belong to the group, and you can stay at one and play at all. This means you have access to four oversized swimming pools (three with swim-up bars), six whirlpools, two health spas, 10 restaurants, and a lush golf course.

Sandals Halcyon is north of Castries on a splendid beach. If a comparison must be made, this Sandals is a bit more laid-back than the others, but it lacks none of the trademark sophistication and romance. Every room is furnished in fine wood, cool tile, and bright island prints. A king-size four-poster bed faces the cable TV for late-night snuggle-viewing.

SANDALS REGENCY ST. LUCIA GOLF & SPA RESORT

La Toc Bay
☎ 758-452-3081 or 800-600-2688, fax 758-452-1012
www.sandals.com
213 rooms, 60 suites
$$$$ (AI)

Sandals Regency is south of Castries on 155 secluded acres fronted by white sand on crescent-shaped La Toc Bay. The energetic staff keeps things moving at a rapid pace, but guests can escape to their room or suite. All accommodations are tucked into soft-colored hillside villas which are elegantly decorated with mahogany furniture and elegant fabrics. Each room has a king-size bed and cable TV, while suites include concierge service, sitting rooms, larger bathrooms, robes, and an in-room bar. Hilltop suites have private plunge pools.

SANDALS GRANDE ST. LUCIA BEACH RESORT & SPA
Pigeon Point Causeway
☎ 758-455-2000 or 800-600-2688, fax 758-455-2001
www.sandals.com
300 room, including nine suites
$$$$ (AI)

Sandals Grande was formerly the Hyatt Regency. This Colonial-style resort sits on the narrow strip of land that connects the main island with Pigeon Point and Pigeon Island National Park. Water is an important feature here, and every guest room and all public areas have sweeping views of either the beach and Rodney Bay or the Caribbean. The low-rise complex is centered around a fantastic one-acre freeform swimming lagoon trimmed with grottoes, waterfalls, and tropical landscaping.

Each spacious air conditioned room is elegantly decorated and includes every convenience. You'll be reminded of gracious plantation living by the antique reproduction furniture, bright island colors, and native art.

GREEN PARROT INN
Morne Fortuné
☎ 758-452-3399, fax 758-453-2272
62 rooms
$$

The motel-style rooms are nothing special, but the views from this hillside inn set above the capital's harbor are terrific. If you aren't drawn by the setting and room rates, try the food. You'll be hooked for sure. Chef-owner-manager Harry Edward Joseph is a worldly epicurean who enjoys showing off his culinary talents, and the weekday business lunch is the most popular meal on the island.

Be sure to ask for a room with a view. There's no difference in price, and you don't want to miss the best feature of the inn. All rooms are air conditioned and have cable TV, but the furnishings and décor are merely comfortable and basic. Guests have a panoramic view from the swimming pool, bar, and restaurant. If you aren't content to hang out at the inn all day, take the free shuttle into Castries or out to the beach. See *Where To Eat* for details about the **Green Parrot Restaurant**.

ST JAMES CLUB/MORGAN BAY
Choc Bay
☎ 758-450-2511 or 800-345-0356, fax 758-450-1050
www.eliteislandresorts.com
238 rooms
$$$$ (AI)

Formerly known as the Wyndham Morgan Bay, the resort was taken over by new management in 2002, and became the sister property of the St. James Club on Antigua. By whatever name, it is still one of the most pres-

tigious all-inclusive resorts in the Caribbean. Its fantastic location between Castries and Rodney Bay puts you right in the center of all the activity, but you're unlikely to leave the property. The activities list and amenities are just too good to abandon, even for an afternoon. This is a family resort, with a full-day program for kids, as well as an adults-only pool and activities specifically for grown-ups. Massages, facials, and body treatments are available at the full-service spa. Down on the soft-sand beach, you'll have unlimited use of all types of watersports equipment.

The resort also offers a variety of dining experiences. The **Tradewinds Restaurant** serves buffet-style meals, the **Palm Grill** offers a casual menu, and plantation-style **Nicole's** is rated five-star and noted for superb steaks (guests pay a supplement to dine at Nicole's). You'll have nightly entertainment at the poolside **Sundowner**, and can grab a midnight snack at the moonlight pizza party down at the beachside Palm Grill.

Comfortable rooms provide a welcome retreat from non-stop activities. Each room and suite is air conditioned and has a king-size bed, cable TV, clock radio, coffee maker, hair dryer, and private balcony. One-bedroom suites have a separate living area, ocean view, and an oversized marble bathroom.

TUXEDO VILLAS
Rodney Bay
☎ 758-452-8553 or 800-600-2688, fax 452-8577
10 apartments
$$

These new apartments across the street from fabulous Reduit Beach provide guests extra space in one- or two-bedroom units. Housed in a two-story building with a central pool and courtyard, each air conditioned apartment has a living room, dining area, fully equipped kitchen, and either one or two bathrooms. Perfect for families or friends sharing expenses, Tuxedo has its own restaurant, bar, mini-market, and coin-op laundry. There's no need for a car, since all the facilities of Rodney Bay and Reduit Beach are within walking distance.

TOP O' THE MORNE APARTMENTS
Morne Fortuné
☎ 785-452-3603, fax 758-453-1433
www.topothemorne.com
12 apartments
$

Try this little apartment complex, if you're looking for a place right in the capital city. Originally a British government office built during the island's Colonial period, the complex now houses up-to-date apartments with fully equipped modern kitchens. In addition, you get daily maid ser-

vice, use of the swimming pool, and a furnished terrace with spectacular views, and one or two bedrooms. Each unit is furnished in a sleek contemporary style, and 14-foot ceilings make every room spacious and airy. The grounds have been landscaped with palms, bougainvillea, and fruit trees. This is a great option for families on a budget, since meals can be prepared "at home" from fresh fish and produce bought at the Castries Market. If you don't want to cook, dozens of restaurants are a short ride away. The Canadian owners are friendly and always ready to help with booking tours, finding activities, and getting to the beach. Plan to rent a car, since it's a steep climb up Morne Fortuné, and there are no sidewalks or shoulders along the roadway.

CLUB ST. LUCIA BY SPLASH
Anse du Cap
☎ 758-450-0551 or 877-927-7527, fax 758-450-0281
www.splashresorts.com
372 rooms, including 55 suites
$$$$ (AI)

Far on the northern tip of the island, this everything-to-everybody all-inclusive resort is St. Lucia's largest hotel complex. Five vacation villages sprawl across 65 garden-like acres with two beaches, five swimming pools, four restaurants, and a staggering list of activities to please every child, couple, single adult, and family.

You can get married in one of the wedding chapels overlooking the sea, play unlimited tennis on one of the lighted courts, exercise in the gym, take a sailboat or kayak out for a spin around the bay, drop the little ones at the supervised **Kid's Club** for the day, or join a volleyball game on the beach. Better yet, enjoy a massage at the spa, then sprawl on a hammock stretched between two palm trees, order a fruity rum drink from the bar, and ask someone to wake you in time for dinner.

You'll get all this and more at a bargain price, by Caribbean standards, which is why most of the rooms are full year-round. Families and young adults on a budget love the place. If you want to get away from some of the endless action, book a room in the adults-only Hummingbird Village.

Throughout the complex, each village is made up of colorful multi-unit bungalows scattered among the hills. Each spacious air conditioned room has a king-size bed, ceiling fan, cable TV, and a private patio. Larger suites have separate living areas that can be converted into sleeping space.

All-inclusive rates include meals, snacks, drinks, watersports, tennis, scheduled recreational activities, live musical entertainment each night, and a supervised program for children.

■ Southwest Coast

JALOUSIE HILTON RESORT & SPA
Anse des Pitons
☎ 758-459-7666 or 800-600-2688, fax 758-459-7667
www.jalousie-hilton.com
114 rooms and villas
$$$$ (AI)

Surprisingly, this massive resort is almost hidden in the dense foliage that grows on the mountainside between the twin Pitons. The site has won environmental awards and is designated a rainforest nature sanctuary and national marine reserve. Hilton International has put about US$6 million into the resort, which it manages and owns jointly with the St. Lucian government and the original developer.

Dozens of cottages are scattered among the trees on the 325-acre property located only two miles south of Soufrière. A shuttle bus takes guests from their villas down the steep hill to the beach, restaurants, and public areas.

Sugar Mill rooms are located near the remains of an 18th-century sugar mill on the secluded white-sand beach. They are spacious with king or twin beds, a large bathroom with a dressing area, and a private terrace. **Hillside** villas have king-size beds, private plunge pools, and panoramic views of the mountains and bay. Larger villa suites have an additional separate living room. Every room and villa is air conditioned and has a ceiling fan, mini-bar, coffee maker, satellite TV and VCR. Among the room amenities are bath robes, bidets, hair dryers, and makeup mirrors.

Guests can choose from four dining areas that are spread throughout the resort and include poolside and beachside service. In addition, a world-class spa offers health and beauty treatments (including one designed specifically for men) in a stunning outdoor area, and you have unlimited use of the a well-equipped fitness center, four tennis courts, and a large swimming pool surrounded by wide decks. Tons of white sand have been brought in to transform the naturally black-sand beach. Watersports include snorkeling, water skiing, windsurfing. The on-site PADI dive center offers scuba lessons, resort dives, and excursions by boat to the island's most popular reefs and wrecks.

MARIGOT BEACH CLUB HOTEL & DIVE RESORT
Marigot Bay
☎ 758-451-4974 or 800-263-4202, fax 758-451-4973
www.marigotdiveresort.com
30 villas
$$$

This popular resort depends on its outstanding location and relaxed atmosphere to draw repeat guests year after year. It's set on the north side of gorgeous Marigot Bay, and all of the breezy units are either beach-front or beach-view. Some of the well-equipped villas accommodate up to 10 guests, and the snug studios are a perfect hideaway for two. All are cooled by ceiling fans, but you can flip on the A/C if you get too warm. Studios have a small kitchenette, larger villas feature full kitchens, and every unit has a king-size bed and its own patio.

Doolittle's Restaurant is steps away, and features Créole and international dishes. If you're in the mood for a burger, **Big Bamboo** cooks up about 50 different kinds. Diving is the main passion among most guests, and a PADI dive shop offers training and scuba/snorkeling trips. In addition, there's a swimming pool, a water-sports center on the shady beach, a gym, and gift shop.

OASIS MARIGOT
Marigot Bay
☎ 758-451-4185 or 800-263-4202 (US)
00-800-2785 8241 (worldwide), fax 758-451-4608
www.oasismarigot.com
21 rooms, apartments, & villas
$$$

Four types of accommodations are available at the Oasis on Marigot Bay. **The Inn** is a Colonial-style two-story building with a wraparound balcony overlooking the courtyard pool and bay. Each of the four large double rooms open onto the terrace and has a private bath and sitting area.

The Ocean Cottage has four self-contained apartments. Each features a luxuriously furnished living area, bedroom with a king or queen bed, tiled bathroom with shower, fully outfitted kitchen, and a private terrace shaded by tropical landscaping. You have a choice of walking to the nearby beach and restaurants, or staying "home" to enjoy the pool and sauna, and barbecue on the open wood fire pit.

The Vacation Club is a cluster of 12 private sea houses that overlook a shady beach accessible only by water. Each modern two-story house is individually decorated and features a master bedroom, living room with a sofa bed, and fully equipped kitchen. Both the upstairs living area and downstairs bedroom have double French doors that open onto verandas with views of the bay.

The Great House is pure self-indulgence with breathtaking views of the bay, mountains, and sea. It accommodates up to six people in three bedrooms (two have private baths; a third bath is off the common area). Built in the tradition of the original greathouses that once overlooked thriving Caribbean plantations, it has a grassy lawn edged with tropical plants and royal palms, a huge cliff-side veranda, and freshwater swimming pool. Inside, classic-style columns form a grand entry into the vast living area with its 20-foot vaulted ceiling, and entertainment system. A formal dining room sits adjacent to the kitchen that offers every modern convenience. A housekeeper and gardener maintain the house and grounds, and guests can request a cook, chauffeur or nanny.

TI KAYE VILLAGE
Anse Cochon
☎ 758-456-8101, fax 758-456-8105
www.tikaye.com
33 cottages
$$

I think this little hideaway is a real bargain. Developer Nick Pinnock designed the resort to insure maximum privacy and great views by tucking each cottage into the lush foliage that grows on the hillside above secluded Anse Cochon. For a very reasonable price, you get more than 750 square feet of air conditioned space, a large veranda furnished with rocking chairs and a two-person hammock, an oversized open-air garden shower, a four-poster king-size bed, and breakfast each morning in the dining pavilion.

No one under age 12 is allowed, so the resort is quiet and peaceful. You can spend all day lazing in your hammock, or walk down the steep stairs leading to the bay to snorkel in the clear water or nap on the sandy beach. Since the resort is remote, you'll be wise to sign up for the optional meal plan. The cuisine is superb, and the open-air dining pavilion is a romantic spot with splendid views.

ANSE CHASTANET RESORT
Anse Chastanet
☎ 758-459-7000, 800-223-1109 or 800-600-2688, fax 758-459-7700
www.ansechastanet.com
49 rooms
$$$$

If you like posh and polish, skip this fabulous-but-earthy resort that caters to divers, nature lovers, and reckless romantics. Your first clue to the drama of Anse Chastanet is the brain-bouncing, rut-ravaged dirt road that leads to the magnificent marine reserve off the beach at Anse Chastanet. If you survive the ride, you're rewarded with paradise.

The resort climbs the hill that rises steeply from the black-and-white sand beach. Rooms were cleverly designed by Canadian owner Nick Troubetzkoy to be open to nature but screened from the view of other guests. All are large and rustically elegant, with high ceilings, open walls, and balconies that wrap around trees. You'll have the pleasant sensation of being outdoors while enjoying the comfort of inside conveniences. The furniture is handcrafted from local wood that blends perfectly with the island art, fresh flowers, tree-house views, and nature sounds that pour in from every direction.

Ask for one of the premium or deluxe rooms located at the top of the hill. You'll be rewarded for the precipitous climb with breathtaking vistas of the Pitons and sea. Standard rooms are similar, but with less dramatic views and a bit less space. Each opens onto a balcony and has a ceiling fan, small refrigerator, hair dryer, and coffee maker – but no phone or TV. The tropical décor includes madras fabrics and terra-cotta tile or wood-plank floors.

The Piton Restaurant and Bar, located midway up the hill, has grand views, and the beachside **Trou-au-Diable** restaurant is handy for lunch or snacks. Each week the resort throws a party and cookout on the beach featuring a steel band.

Scuba St. Lucia, a five-star PADI dive center, offers underwater excursions for certified divers and training courses on all levels. Guests at the resort have complimentary use of snorkel equipment, windsurfers, and other sports equipment. Anse Chastanet is known for its superb beach access to the marine reserve with good visibility and extraordinary coral, sponges, and fish a short distance from shore. When you need a break from the water, you can play a game of tennis, workout in the exercise gym, or sign up for one of the island-wide sightseeing trips. A water taxi runs from the beach to Soufrière.

HUMMINGBIRD BEACH RESORT
Anse Chastanet/Soufrière
☎ 758-459-7232 or 800-223-9815, fax 758-459-7033
www.nvo.com/pitonresort/home
Nine cabins & rooms
$$

Located at the beginning of the road that leads to Anse Chastanet beach on the northern edge of Soufrière, the Hummingbird is the ideal low-cost retreat. Its enchanting cabins overlook the Pitons and Caribbean, and you can walk into town or to the main beach at Anse Chastanet in about five minutes. Most rooms have a private bath, but one suite and two standard rooms share a bath. One cottage has two bedrooms, a sitting area, and kitchen. The resort is rustic and cooled by ceiling fans, but there are occasional elegant touches, such as stone walls, cathedral ceilings, and mahogany four-poster beds in three of the deluxe rooms.

Guests enjoy swimming in the attractive freshwater pool, and watching the sun set from the beachside bar. The Lifeline Restaurant has a reputation for serving some of the best food on the island, and it's a popular hangout for locals and visitors arriving by private yacht. Owner Joan Alexander is a native St. Lucian and gifted artist. When she's not busy overseeing the resort, she operates an on-site studio and gift shop that features her colorful batiks.

THE STILL BEACH RESORT
Soufrière
☎ 758-459-5179 or 800-600-2688, fax 758-459-7301
www.wiol.com/st-lucia/the-still/default.html
14 apartments, six studios
$$

With two properties and one name, this resort/plantation offers guests several options. The **Plantation** has 14 apartments, each with one or two bedrooms, set on a 400-acre working estate located short distance inland from the coast on the Fond St. Jacques Road. All the spacious units have a sitting area and ceiling fans; most are air conditioned and have a kitchen. The popular **Still Restaurant** serves Créole specialties.

The Beach Resort is on the north end of Soufrière Bay. Two studio and three one-bedroom apartments are on the upper level of the beachfront building and have wonderful views of the Pitons. All units are cheerfully decorated and cooled by ceiling fans; some have a kitchen. A shuttle bus runs between the two properties, but they are within walking distance of each other. Guests have privileges at both. When combined, there are two restaurants, two bars, a swimming pool, a gift boutique, and stables that offer horseback-riding.

LADERA RESORT
Soufrière
☎ 758-459-7323 or 800-841-4145 or 800-600-2688, fax 758-459-5156
www.ladera-stlucia.com
19 suites, six villas
$$$$

Ladera rivals Anse Chastanet for the title of most unusual resort on the island. Every room is different, but each has an open west wall that allows guests unrestricted views of nature and the setting sun. Positioned 1,000 feet above the Caribbean on a hillside between the Piton peaks, the resort is designed so that all rooms, although open on one side, are completely screened from anyone passing by. Trade winds prevent a problem with flying insects, and the lofty location guarantees cool temperatures for sleeping.

Some accommodations feature private waterfall pools and kitchens, others have small plunge pools. All are exquisitely furnished with four-poster

beds, antiques and local art. One of the villas accommodates up to six guests and has a heated indoor plunge pool, an open-air master bedroom and bath, a separate second bedroom and bath, and a third sleeping area. Another villa also sleeps six and has a private garden swimming pool and a dining area.

The grounds are lavishly landscaped and include a lovely swimming pool and sun deck with dramatic views of the Pitons and Caribbean. **Dasheene Restaurant** has an international reputation and is known for excellent cuisine, often prepared by visiting chefs from the US and Europe. A complimentary shuttle bus takes guests into Soufrière and to nearby beaches. While most guests come to Ladera for seclusion and relaxation, the resort will arrange sightseeing or sports excursions for those who grow restless.

■ South Coast

JULIETTE'S LODGE
Beanfield/Vieux Fort
☎ 758-454-5300, fax 758-454-5305
www.julietteslodge.com
27 rooms, three apartments
$

This pink four-level building is owned and managed by a friendly St. Lucian couple, Juliette and Andrew. She runs the kitchen. He oversees the hotel. The air conditioned rooms are comfortable and spacious with patios, TVs, and one or two beds. Apartments have one or two bedrooms and a living area. There's a small, round swimming pool, and mountain bikes are available at extra charge, but most guests spend their days windsurfing. **Tornado Surf Center** is a 10-minute walk from the lodge and has a discount-rate deal with Juliette's. Surfers and surfing fans enjoy drinks at the bar and superb meals at the restaurant. Juliette specializes in West Indian dishes, but the menu lists a variety of international choices.

KIMATRAI HOTEL
Vieux Fort (New Dock Road)
☎ 758-454-6328, fax 758-454-3038
www.kimatraihotel.com
Eight rooms & apartments
$

Nothing fancy, but if you plan to stay awhile, this is a good choice. You'll be near Hewanorra International Airport and within walking distance of south-coast beaches. Rooms are fresh and nicely decorated, but the apartments have more room. Each unit is air conditioned and outfitted with cable TVs, small refrigerators, sea-view balconies, and spacious tiled

bathrooms. Studios and two-bedroom apartments have a kitchen, but there's a restaurant and bar on site. Breakfast is included in the room rate.

■ East Coast

FOX GROVE INN
Mon Repose
☎ 758-455-3271, fax 758-455-3800
www.foxgroveinn.com
12 rooms
$

This is the spot for hikers, surfers, bird watchers, and anyone who wants to be off the beaten path but supremely comfortable. Located just south of Dennery, the hillside estate offers easy access to south-coast beaches, the central rainforest, and east-coast nature reserves. Owned by St. Lucian Franz Louis-Fernand, the place has an international ambiance, forged from Franz's 35 years experience as a chef in Europe and nurtured by his Swiss wife, Esther.

The rooms are basic motel-style double accommodations, with ceiling fans and private bathrooms as their only luxuries. Half of the units have a balcony; one room will accommodate up to four people. There's a large swimming pool with a sundeck, and the grounds are attractively landscaped, but the real treasure is the inn's **Whispering Palms Restaurant**. Franz is master of the kitchen and uses fresh-from-the-bay fish and locally grown produce to create luscious meals that are among the best on the island. You'll recognize the gourmet touches he learned over the years in some of the best hotel kitchens in England, Belgium, France, and Switzerland. Eat inside or out, and allow time to admire the magnificent ocean views from the restaurant's large patio.

Camping

The National Trust recently opened St. Lucia's only campground at **Anse la Liberté**, south of the settlements at Anse la Raye and Canaries. Tents and teepees are set off the ground on wooden decks, and facilities include barbecue grills, showers, toilets, and a communal pavilion powered by solar energy. Four miles of nature trails wind through the 133-acre campground, which slopes down to a rocky beach on a lovely bay. A bare site without a tent rents for about EC$50/US$20; permanent tents and teepees rent for around EC$100/US$40. Call ahead for reservations, ☎ 758-452-5005, www.slunatrust.org.

Where To Eat

St. Lucia has an abundance of splendid places to eat, from sophisticated to casual. Most serve customers outdoors on scenic patios, and menus feature international as well as West Indian cuisine. Many of the chefs have trained in Europe or the US, and their cooking reflects this diversity.

Expect prices to be high, since many items must be imported. Dishes prepared with local ingredients are usually bargains, and you'll find particularly good and original meals at little beachside cafés. Order a **Piton** beer, which is brewed in Vieux Fort, or a rum drink mixed with island-made **Bounty** or **Old Fort Reserve** rum, to accompany your meal.

Only the most luxurious resorts have a dress code. Most restaurants realize you're on vacation and expect you to dress accordingly. You will most likely be eating outdoors on a breezy veranda, perhaps near the sea, so bring a sweater if you chill easily. Otherwise, "dressy" shorts or a colorful sundress is appropriate in the evening, and you can get by with a swimsuit coverup during the day.

During the off-season some restaurants close entirely, and others may have limited hours each day. Call ahead to avoid disappointment. During the winter season the best restaurants book up quickly, so call early for a reservation.

■ Restaurant Price Guide

Use the following scale as a guide. Menus usually list prices in Eastern Caribbean dollars, but the following scale is based on US dollars. (US$1 = EC$2.67)

DINING PRICE SCALE	
Based on a complete dinner for one person excluding drinks, taxes, and tips. Lunch prices will be lower.	
$	Under $15
$$	$15 to $25
$$$	$26 to $40
$$$$	Over $40

Most restaurants accept major credit cards, but remote cafés and small operations (beach vendors, market stalls, and some family-run places)

may require cash. If you pay in US dollars, expect change in Eastern Caribbean dollars. Check your bill for an added service charge. Many restaurants automatically tack on a 10% fee, which you may consider to be the tip, or deduct it from the typical 15% to 20% if you think the wait staff deserves it.

■ Castries

An alleyway lined with food stalls and outdoor tables is located at the south end of the local market (see page 145). This is a place for locals, so prices are fair and the quality is good. Try curried meats, coal pot stews, and fresh coconut drinks. The stalls are open Monday through Saturday until 5pm.

Other quick-bite in-town eateries include **The Pink Elephant Grill and Bar** in the Cox Building on William Peter Boulevard, ☎ 758-453-2847. Expect a crowd at lunchtime. They serve bargain-priced daily specials such as grilled chicken and fish, as well as a variety of sandwiches; open weekdays, 9am to 6pm, and Saturday, 9am to 2pm.

On Brazil Street overlooking Derek Walcott Square you'll find **Chez Paul**, ☎ 758-452-3022, with service on the balcony and a menu featuring French and Pacific Rim cuisine; open 8:30am to 10pm, Monday to Saturday.

Kimlans, upstairs on Micoud Street on the north side of the square, ☎ 758-452-1136, serves bargain-priced local dishes, including curries and rotis; open 7am to 11pm, Monday through Saturday.

Vegetarians will want to try **The Natural Café** on Chausée Road, ☎ 758-452-6241. It's open 8:30am to 6pm weekdays, and 9am to 2pm on Saturday, and is a health food store as well as a restaurant.

The best pizza is at **Peppino's** on Upper Bridge Street; open daily, 11am to 8pm, ☎ 758-452-3942.

■ Castries Area

GREEN PARROT RESTAURANT
Morne Fortuné
☎ 758-452-3399
French/International
$$$$
Daily, 7am to midnight
Reservations required

Weekdays, this exquisite hotel restaurant serves an inexpensive business lunch from noon to 3 pm. In the evening, a more elaborate four-course dinner is laid out on crisp table linens. Men are required to wear jackets and

women dress to match. London-trained chef Harry Joseph Edwards specializes in French-inspired cuisine using local ingredients, but the menu includes such things as taco shell appetizers, Indian curries, and Créole fish. You can also order shrimp, lobster, and steaks.

Request a table near the window so you'll have a view of the lights in Castries and the harbor during your meal. On Wednesday and Saturday, Chef Harry Edwards comes out of the kitchen to get everyone involved in dancing to the live band. On Monday nights, all women who wear a flower in their hair and are accompanied by a well-dressed man receive a free dinner. Be sure to make reservations well in advance if you want to dine at the Green Parrot on any of these special evenings.

BON APPETIT
Morne Fortuné
☎ 758-452-2747
Seafood and steaks
$$$$
Monday through Friday, 11am to 2pm and 6:30 to 9:30pm
Saturday and Sunday, 6:30 to 9:30pm
Reservations required

The views of Castries and the harbor are spectacular at this cozy restaurant. The food is outstanding, but portions are on the small side. You pay for the ambiance and views. The wine list is impressive and pricey.

SAN ANTOINE
Morne Fortuné
☎ 758-452-4660
Continental
$$$$
Open for lunch Monday through Friday, noon to 2pm
Open for dinner Monday through Saturday, 6:30pm to midnight
Reservations suggested

This luxurious restaurant was originally the site of a grand home built in the 1880s. Later it became the San Antoine Hotel, which burned down in 1970. Only the thick stone walls survived, and the present restaurant was built around them. The results are truly elegant. The cuisine matches the surroundings, and there is a fine wine list to complete the package. Fresh vegetables are served with meals that include lobster thermidor, crab-stuffed pastry-wrapped chicken breast, and bearnaise-sauced steak stuffed with chopped shrimp. Finally, choose a dessert from the trolley that displays an assortment of marvelous indulgences.

JIMMIE'S
Vigie Cove Marina
☎ 758-452-5142
Seafood
$$
Daily, 11am to 11pm

The veranda overlooking the marina is a relaxing boat-lover place, perfect for a soup-and-salad lunch or an appetizer-and-drink sunset snack. After dark, when the lights come on in the harbor, the open-air ambiance turns casually romantic. Service is friendly and laid-back, and all the food has a fresh, home-cooked flavor. If you're really hungry, try the Harbor Catch, a seafood platter that comes with a bit of everything from the sea plus some local vegetables. The menu also includes crab, fish cooked in various ways, and a delicious seafood crêpe. Order warm banana fritters with ice cream for dessert.

COAL POT
Vigie Cove Marina
☎ 758-452-5566, fax 758-453-6776
www.coalpotrestaurant.com
Nouvelle Caribbean
$$
Monday through Saturday, noon to 3pm and 7pm to 10pm
Reservations suggested

This popular spot with only 10 tables gets crowded quickly, so arrive early for lunch and make reservations for dinner. Artist Michelle Elliot and her French-chef husband, Xavier, have a long-standing reputation for friendly service and excellent cuisine distinguished by the mingling of island products and classic preparation. Lunch specials feature fresh fish and seafood salads, while dinner highlights include smoked salmon, coquilles St. Jacques, lobster, and curried meats. You have a large choice of wines, including some fine vintages from France and Chile, to accompany your meal. The open-air restaurant is decorated with Michelle's colorful paintings, which give the wood-and-stone structure a unique spirit. This is a don't-miss dining experience.

■ North of Castries

Rodney Bay is a lively area with several good to great restaurants. You can't go wrong at any of them. A string of waterfront eateries overlook Reduit Beach, and still others cluster around the highway. On Friday nights, vendors set up barbecue pits in Gros Islet to feed the hungry jump-up crowd. Plan to eat your way through the street-dancers, and pick up a local beer to accompany your dinner.

KEY LARGO
Castries-Gros Islet Highway
Rodney Bay
☎ 758-452-0282, fax 758-452-9933
Pizza & Pasta
$
Daily, 7:30am to midnight

Owners Marie, Carlo and Val run this landmark pizzeria. You can't miss the large white Spanish-style building circled by a red brick wall. Inside the spacious restaurant the three owners hustle around making sure their friendly staff keeps up with the constant demand for the island's best wood-fire pizza. Longtime customers have begun to appreciate the new menu, which includes sandwiches, salads, lasagna, cannelloni and *spaghetti pomodoro e basilico*; breakfast items include freshly squeezed juice. Top off your meal with a cup of freshly ground espresso.

THE LIME
Rodney Bay
☎ 758-452-0761, fax 758-452-9446
Caribbean
$$
Wednesday through Monday, 7am to 11 pm
Reservations suggested

This multifaceted spot located in a lovely white building overlooking the bay is a bar, nightclub, and three-meals-a-day restaurant. All the food is delicious and many dishes are accented with traditional island sauces. Try *rotis* or crêpes for a snack or light lunch, and seafood or lamb at dinner. Prices are reasonable, which is probably why you need a reservation to get a table on most evenings. Many customers stay on for the late-night entertainment at the adjoining club.

LA CREOLE
Rodney Bay Marina
☎ 758-450-0022; fax 450-0378
French Créole
$$$
Daily, 11:30am to 10pm
Reservations suggested

Martinique comes to St. Lucia at this popular restaurant owned by Lise Herman, who was born on the French island and trained in Paris. The specialties are outstanding and include red snapper stuffed with sweet potatoes in a passion fruit and orange sauce, and mixed seafood in coconut and curry sauce stuffed in a christophene shell. For dessert, you can choose from a large list that includes chocolate-covered profiteroles, bananas flambé and fruit-filled crêpes. Enjoy dancing most evenings, and live bands several times a week.

SPINNAKERS BEACH BAR & GRILL
Reduit Beach
☎ 758-452-8491
Mixed menu
$$
Monday through Saturday, 6:30am to midnight
Reservations accepted

Spinnakers is on one of the island's best and most popular beaches. They serve a full English breakfast, inexpensive lunches, and casual dinners. The menu includes grilled chicken breast stuffed with brie and spinach, and three kinds of lasagna. Many people like to watch the sun set from the veranda while enjoying one of the signature drinks; happy hour coincides with sunset.

SNOOTY AGOUTI
Rodney Bay
☎ 758-452-0321, fax 758-452-9806
Eclectic
$
Daily, 9am to midnight

Clever name, clever concept. Not only an all-day restaurant, the Agouti is also an art gallery, book-swap shop, gift store, bar, and Internet café. The menu features homemade soup, vegetarian lasagna, moussaka, and several kinds of sandwiches, but many customers come in just for one of the "gooey desserts," which change daily. You can also grab a cup of gourmet coffee – there are 30 blends and flavors – and go on-line to check your e-mail. You simply have to stop in to see what's going on at the moment.

THE GREAT HOUSE
Cap Estate
☎ 758-450-0450
French/International
$$$$
Tuesday through Sunday, 4:30pm to 10pm
Reservations required

Elegant attire is requested at this grand plantation manor, which brings back memories of a festive, graceful time in St. Lucia's history. It's built on the original foundations of the de Longueville Estate, which was constructed during the 1700s. You enter the Colonial-style mansion by a grand staircase, and dine by candlelight with polished service, excellent cuisine, and fine wines. The *prix fixe* meal (the price varies according to the season and menu selections) features a choice of fish, steak, or chicken accompanied by an appetizer, soup and dessert. Other menu items include lobster risotto, roast duck, lamb, and several types of seafood. Try the profiteroles au chocolat for dessert.

The Derek Walcott Theatre is next door to the Great House. Check at the restaurant to see if a performance is scheduled at this small open-air playhouse during your stay on the island.

■ Marigot Bay

This area has developed rapidly over the past few years, and you will find a half-dozen places that serve high-quality meals. The following are current hot spots.

DOOLITTLES RESTAURANT
Marigot Bay
☎ 758-451-4974, fax 758-451-4973
Eclectic
$$
Daily, 6:30am to 10pm

Actually, the entire north side of Marigot Bay is called Doolittles because of the movie that was filmed here, but the name is claimed specifically by this waterside restaurant known for its barbequed meats. Breakfast is standard waffles or eggs with bacon or sausage, and the dinner menu includes fish or meat with a choice of interesting sauces. A ferry will transport you from the Marigot Bay Marina across the lagoon to the restaurant's north shore dock, which is accessible only by boat.

JJ'S PARADISE
Marigot Bay Road
☎ 758-451-4076, fax 758-451-4146
Seafood
$$
Daily from 10am, open late
Reservations recommended

Mr. JJ's place is up the hill, a couple of miles outside the bay, on the road from Castries. He runs a friendly restaurant known for serving excellent fresh fish meals, and since he's not on the bay, his prices are lower. Plan to arrive early most days of the week to beat the lunchtime crowds that come in for the light menu featuring *rotis* and chicken. Other busy times are Wednesday Seafood Night, and both Friday and Saturday nights when there's live music. Check out the mixed seafood platter, a more-than-most-can-eat Caribbean-style meal. Other menu choices include curried chicken, grilled fish, and conch.

CAFE PARADIS
Marigot Beach Club
☎ 758-451-4974, fax 758-451-4973
Caribbean
$$$
Daily from 8am, open late
Reservations accepted

Set on the waterfront, this attractive open-air restaurant serves gourmet meals from morning until night. Breakfast and lunch are well-priced and casual with typical local offerings, but dinner is a more romantic affair against the lights of the harbor. Arrive in time for happy hour at sunset, then move to a harbor-side table for a slow, relaxing meal featuring escargot, fish or lamb with a flavorful French-inspired sauce, followed by tropical fruit or a homemade dessert.

SOUFRIERE
Anse Chastanet Resort
North of Soufrière
☎ 758-459-7354, fax 758-459-7700
Local specialties
$$$
Daily, 6:30am to 9pm
Reservations recommended for dinner

Between the casual beach café and the hillside restaurant, you can find a wide variety of dishes. Resort guests are on the all-inclusive plan, but the dining rooms are open to everyone. Lunch tends to be a light meal of grilled fish or chicken and a choice of salads, burgers, and sandwiches. The double-level hillside restaurant offers more elaborate dinner fare, including seafood with tasty sauces, pastry-wrapped conch, and a selection of meat dishes. Both eateries have scenic views of the Pitons and Caribbean.

LA HAUT PLANTATION RESTAURANT
West Coast Road
North of Soufrière
☎ 758-459-7008, fax 758-454-9463
Créole/International
$$$
Tuesday through Sunday, 9am to 9pm
Reservations suggested for dinner

You'll have great views from this pleasant resort restaurant about two miles north of Soufrière. The lunch offerings feature a special clam chowder, crêpes, pasta, sandwiches, and jerk pork. At dinner, the highlights are jumbo shrimp in garlic butter, *lambi* in Créole sauce, and lobster in a white wine sauce. Service is friendly and relaxed, and the grounds include a tropical garden and pond. An adjacent boutique sells island crafts and

gift items. Sports buffs will enjoy watching live-via-satellite events shown on a 60-inch television. Cold beer and snacks are available during games. Call ahead to request the broadcast of a particular event.

HUMMINGBIRD RESORT RESTAURANT & BAR
Soufrière
☎ 758-459-7232, fax 758-459-7033
French Créole
$$$$
Daily, 7am to 10am, noon to 2:30pm, and 7pm to 10pm
Reservations suggested for dinner

Set in a garden at the northern entrance to town, this charming restaurant features excellent gourmet meals, friendly service, and outstanding views of the Pitons across Soufrière Bay. The menu features fish fresh straight from the sea and local vegetables laced with island spices. The wine list is first-class to match the cuisine and service. At lunch, you can order lighter meals, salads, and sandwiches. The **Bamboo Beach Bar** is an excellent place to enjoy a drink while you watch the sun set into the sea. Don't leave without checking out the batik art designed by Joyce Alexander, the talented and gregarious owner.

THE STILL BEACH RESTAURANT
Soufrière Bay
☎ 758-459-7224
Local cuisine
$$
Daily, 8am to 10pm

All the produce served at The Still is organically grown on the working plantation estate. The resulting meals are fresh and delicious. This is a good place to stop for lunch if you're on a coastal tour or heading into the nearby rainforest. Unfortunately, tour organizers know this, and you may have trouble getting good service if a large group arrives during your meal. At other times, service is friendly and efficient. The menu features seafood, but you can also order beef or pork. Everything is served with local vegetables, such as yams and christophenes.

The Still Plantation Restaurant is located at the Still Beach Resort on the east side of town (see page 205). If one location is crowded, try the other.

CAMILLA'S
Bridge Street
Soufrière
☎ 758-459-5379
Vegetarian/Créole
$$
Daily, 8am to midnight

Right in the middle of town, this tiny second-floor café with a little balcony is a casual spot serving generous portions of well-prepared food. The staff is friendly and efficient, and in the evening you can order grilled fish, barbequed chicken, and vegetarian dishes. At lunch, there's a choice of sandwiches, burgers, and salads.

BANG
Anse des Pitons
☎ 758-459-7864, fax 758-459-5057
Barbeque
$
Daily, noon to midnight

You just have to visit this kooky place to understand what it's all about. Bang is located in a gorgeous spot between the Pitons in Jalousie Cove near the Hilton Resort. It's owned by Englishman Colin Tenant, better known as Lord Glenconner, the aristocratic developer of Mustique Island, and eccentric past owner of a pet elephant. He ran into some ecological hurdles when he came to St. Lucia to build a fantasy resort, so instead opened Bang, a restaurant, bar, rum shop, and boutique. Locals and tourists come for the inexpensive meals and relaxing atmosphere. Menu stand-outs include fish cake appetizers and meat barbequed in jerk sauce. Plan to spend some time enjoying a drink under the shady open shelters before or after your meal, and call ahead to ask if a band is scheduled to play in the evening.

DASHEENE RESTAURANT
Ladera Resort
Between Soufrière and Vieux Fort
☎ 758-459-7323, fax 758-459-5156
Nouvelle Caribbean
$$$$
Daily, 8 to 10am, 11am to 2:30pm; dinner from 6:30pm until late
Reservations recommended

The view from this restaurant perched 1,000 feet above the coast at Ladera Resort is dramatic and magnificent. You look between the Pitons out toward the sea, so plan to arrive during daylight hours for the best view. Sunsets are spectacular. You would want to eat in this upscale dining room, even if the food was poor, which it is not. In fact, the chef has won several awards for creating the best cuisine on the island. The menu

changes, but expect to find choices such as zippy gazpacho soup, smoked fish, and chicken or beef served with innovative sauces. Desserts are equally imaginative, many served flambé at your table.

St. Lucia A To Z

Airports

Hewanorra International Airport . . . . . ☎ 758-454-6249
George F. L. Charles Airport . . . . . ☎ 758-452-2596

Anchorages

Customs and immigration can be cleared at Rodney Bay, Castries, Marigot Bay or Vieux Fort. A full-service marina is located at Rodney Bay. At Marigot Bay, you must anchor in the harbor and dinghy to the customs office. Boats may also anchor off Reduit Beach, Pigeon Point, Anse Chastanet, Anse Cochon, and Soufrière Bay.

Rodney Bay Marina . . . . . ☎ 758-452-0324, fax 758-452-8363
Castries Yacht Center. . . . . ☎ 758-452-6334

ATM Machines

Cirrus and **Plus** bank cards may be used at 24-hour machines located at the Royal Bank of Canada in Castries and Rodney Bay. Cash advances are possible with a **Visa** or **MasterCard**.

Banks

Banks are open Monday through Thursday, 8am to 3pm, and Friday, 8am to 5pm. **Barclays** and **Royal Bank of Canada** (both at Rodney Bay) and **National Commercial Bank** (in Castries) are also open Saturday, 8am to noon.

You will find **Bank of Nova Scotia**, **Royal Bank of Canada**, and **Canadian Imperial Bank** on William Peter Boulevard in Castries. There are banks on Bridge and Waterfront streets, and branches are located in Vieux Fort, Soufrière, and at Rodney Bay Marina.

Buses

Public transportation is by privately-owned minivans that cover the main routes between **Castries** and **Gros Islets** (route 1A), **Soufrière** (route 3D), and **Vieux Fort** (route 2H). The main bus terminal is behind the Castries market on Jeremie Street.

Credit Cards

Visa, **MasterCard**, and **American Express** are widely accepted. However, most gas stations and many small restaurants and shops do not accept credit cards.

Currency

The official currency on St. Lucia is the **Eastern Caribbean dollar**, EC$. One US dollar exchanges for EC$2.67. Many businesses accept US dollars, but you should carry enough EC dollars to cover one day's expenses, especially if you will be traveling outside the main tourist areas.

Departure Tax

EC$54/US$22 is levied on all passengers more than 12 years of age and may be paid in EC$ or US$. Plan to have the exact amount when you check in, since change may not be available.

Drinking Water

Tap water is safe, but bottled water is readily available. It is not advisable to drink from streams and rivers no matter how sparkling clean they appear.

Driving

Driving is British-style, on the left. There are paved roads to all the main towns and villages, except in the northeast part of the island where most rodas are little more than dirt paths. A four-wheel-drive vehicle is necessary to reach remote areas. Coastal highways are narrow, winding and steep, but in good repair.

Drugs

There are stiff penalties for use, possession, or selling of narcotic drugs.

Electricity

St. Lucia's electricity is **220 volts** AC, 50 cycles, with a square three-prong outlet, so you must use a converter and plug adapter for most US appliances. Many hotels have 110-volt outlets in the bathroom for shavers.

Emergency

Fire, **police**, and **ambulance** . . . . . ☎ 911

Hospitals

Victoria Hospital, Castries (24-hour ER) . . . . . ☎ 758-452-2421
St. Jude's, Vieux Fort (24-hour ER) . . . . . ☎ 758-454-7671
Soufrière Hospital, Soufrière . . . . . ☎ 758-459-7258
Dennery Hospital, Dennery . . . . . ☎ 758-453-3310

Taxes & Tips

An 8% government tax is added to hotel and restaurant bills. Most hotels and restaurants also levy a 10% service charge, to which you may add if you feel the service is worth 15% or 20%.

No sales tax is charged on items bought in the shops.

Telephone

The **area code** for all of St. Lucia is 758. For local calls, dial the seven-digit number. When calling the island from the US dial 1 + 758 + seven-digit local number. To call the US from St. Lucia, dial 1 + area code + local number.

Time

The island of St. Lucia is on **Atlantic Standard Time**, which is one hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time (except during Daylight Saving Time, which is not observed on St. Lucia). When it is noon in New York during the winter, it is 1pm here; during the summer the hour is the same.

Tourist Information

On Island

CASTRIES
Pointe Seraphine and La Place Carenage . . . . . ☎ 758-452 7577

SOUFRIERE
Across from the waterfront on the main road . . . . . ☎ 758-459-7419

GEORGE F.L. CHARLES AIRPORT
Castries . . . . . ☎ 758-452-2596

HEWANORRA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
Vieux Fort . . . . . ☎ 758-454-6644

In The US

THE ST. LUCIA TOURIST BOARD
800 Second Avenue, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10017
☎ 800-456-3984, fax 212-867-2795
www.stlucia.org

In Canada

TOURIST BOARD OF ST. LUCIA
151 Bloor St W #425
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1S4
☎ 416-867-2950, fax 416-961-4317

In The UK

TOURIST BOARD OF ST. LUCIA
10 Kensington Court
London W8 5DL , England
☎ +44-71-937-1969, fax +44-71-937-3611

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